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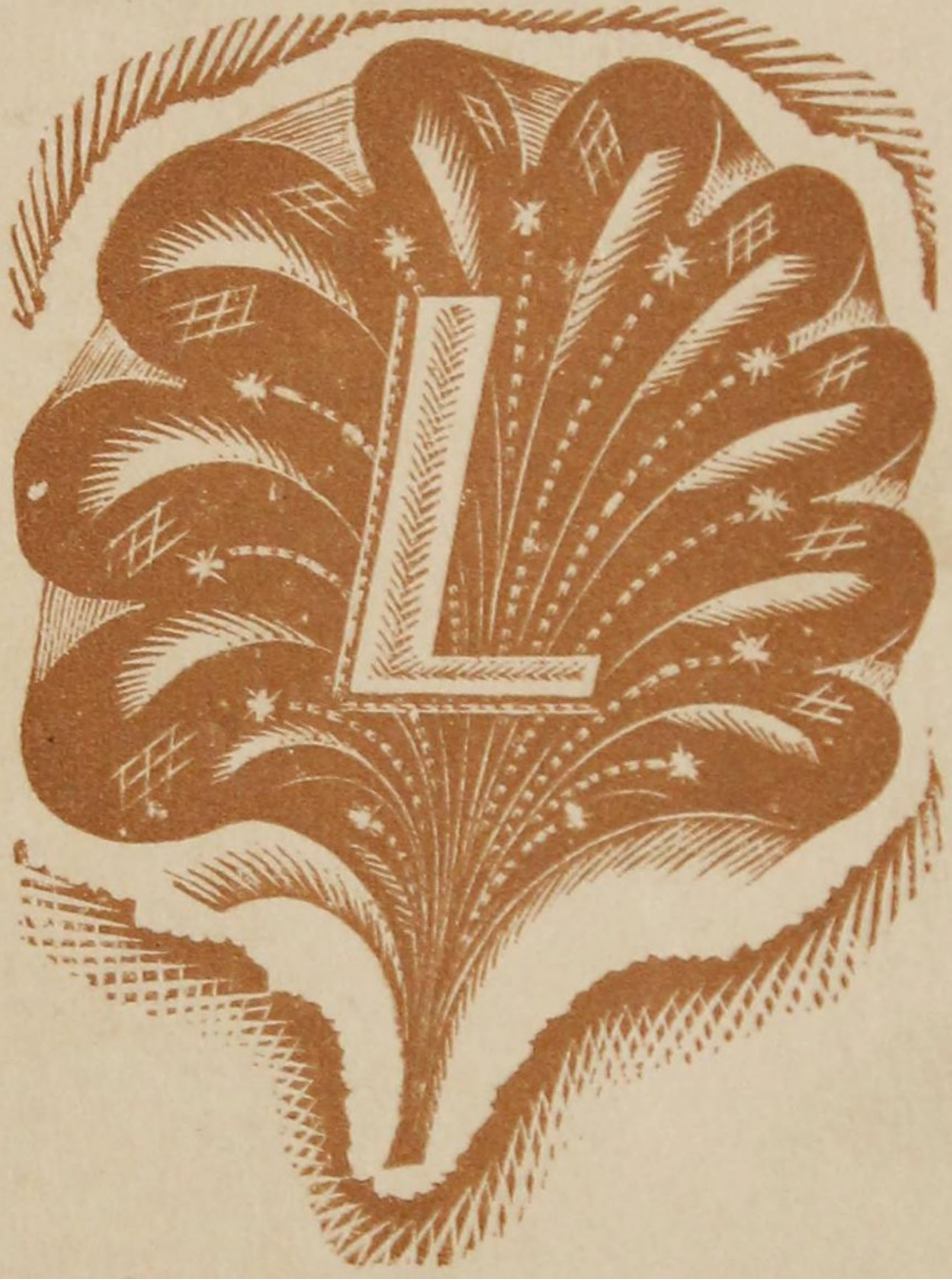

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FICTION

THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL

BY GEORGE MEREDITH

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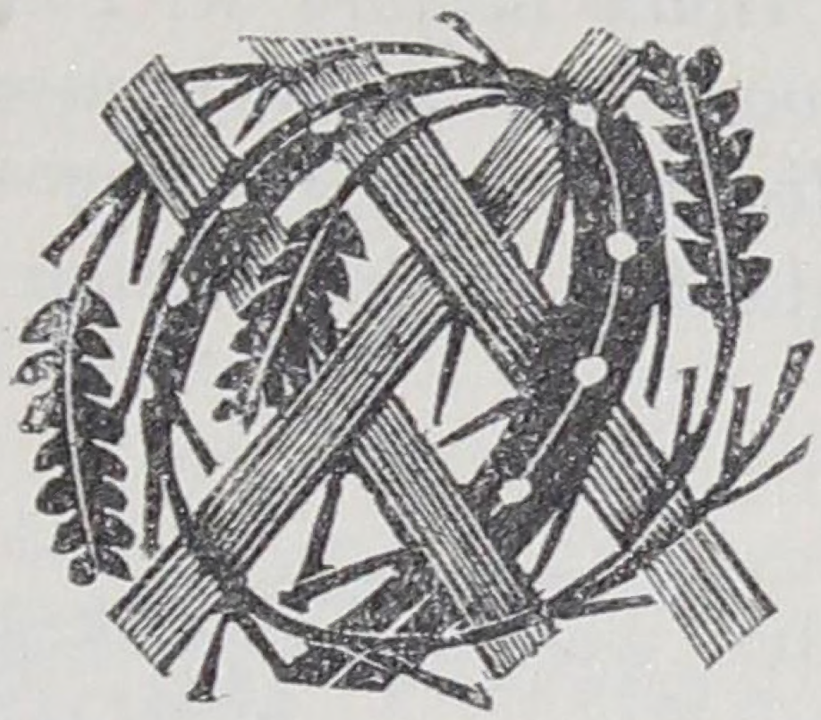
Everyman, I will go with thee, and be thy guide,
In thy most need to go by thy side.

GEORGE MEREDITH, born at Portsmouth in 1828. Came to London in 1844; intended for the law but drifted into authorship and journalism. From 1860 was literary adviser to Chapman and Hall. Died in 1909.

THE ORDEAL
OF RICHARD FEVEREL



GEORGE MEREDITH

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel was written by Meredith in 1859, when he was thirty-one years old. Following the Oriental fantasy, *The Shaving of Shagpat*, and the gothic grotesque *Farina, a Legend of Cologne*, it was thus his third essay in prose-fiction. But it was also his first 'novel' in the Meredithian sense of the word. It marked the beginning of that rich maturity of a personality which found its fullest expression in *The Egoist*.

Richard Feverel thus appears in *Everyman's Library* because it represents Meredith, the mature artist, at his most approachable period, recognizable at once, yet still not too idiosyncratic. Many readers, and many critics, think this is his finest book. Others believe that what he calls 'the comedic spirit' is not yet sufficiently released in this first serious attempt at a criticism of civilization. But whatever the controversy on this matter may ultimately decide, one fact remains: *Richard Feverel* is the most popular and the most immediately appealing of his novels. It is, therefore, the first chosen for Everyman, and is offered now without further comment or criticism. Its seventy-five years of life have dated many of its contemporary features, especially those turns of the plot which depend upon the ideas of morality and chivalry then current: but the fundamental poetry, that *April* quality so characteristic of Meredith, remains to make this story a living record of the rapture of young love, and its conquest over prudential theory.

R. C.

The following is a list of the chief works of Meredith with the date of their first publication in book form:

Poems, 1851; *The Shaving of Shagpat*, 1856; *Farina*, 1857; *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, 1859 (revised ed. 1897); *Evan Harrington*, 1860; *Modern Love and Other Poems*, 1862; *Emilia in England* (renamed *Sandra Belloni* in 1886), 1864; *Rhoda Fleming*, 1865; *Vittoria*, 1867; *The Adventures of Harry Richmond*, 1871; *Beauchamp's Career*, 1876; *The House on the Beach*, 1877; *The Egoist*, 1879; *The Tragic Comedians*, 1880 (revised ed.

1892); *Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth*, 1883; *Diana of the Crossways*, 1885; *Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life*, 1887; *A Reading of Earth*, 1888; *The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper*, 1890; *The Tale of Chloe*, 1890; *One of Our Conquerors*, 1891; *Modern Love* (a reprint including 'The Sage Enamoured,' etc.), 1892; *Poems*: 'The Empty Purse,' etc., 1892; *Lord Ormont and His Aminta*, 1894; *The Amazing Marriage*, 1895; *An Essay on Comedy*, 1897; *Odes in Contribution to the Song of French History*, 1898; *A Reading of Life and Other Poems*, 1901; *Last Poems*, 1909; *Celt and Saxon*, 1910.

Various collected editions of Meredith's works appeared in his lifetime, but they were superseded by the Memorial Edition (1910), issued in 27 volumes. This included miscellaneous prose, various readings, and a bibliography. Later came the standard edition (1914, etc.). *The Letters of George Meredith* were published in 1912 under the editorship of his son, and since then other volumes of correspondence have appeared: *To Edward Clodd and C. K. Shorter*, 1913; *To R. H. Horne*, 1919; *To Swinburne and Watts-Dunton*, 1922; *To Alice Meynell*, 1923. The standard bibliography is that of M. B. Forman, 1922, and the same editor issued a volume of *Meredithiana* in 1924.

Lives and Studies of Meredith include those by Richard le Gallienne (1890), G. M. Trevelyan (1912), Lady Alice Butcher (1919), J. B. Priestley (1926), M. S. Gretton (1926), R. E. Sencourt (1929).

The Ordeal of Richard Feverel is reprinted in Everyman's Library by the permisson of Meredith's Literary Executor and Constable and Co., Ltd.

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CHAPTER I

THE INMATES OF RAYNHAM ABBEY

SOME years ago a book was published under the title of *The Pilgrim's Scrip*. It consisted of a selection of original aphorisms by an anonymous gentleman, who in this bashful manner gave a bruised heart to the world.

He made no pretension to novelty. 'Our new thoughts have thrilled dead bosoms,' he wrote; by which avowal it may be seen that youth had manifestly gone from him, since he had ceased to be jealous of the ancients. There was a half-sigh floating through his pages for those days of intellectual coxcombry, when ideas come to us affecting the embraces of virgins, and swear to us they are ours alone, and no one else have they ever visited: and we believe them.

For an example of his ideas of the sex he said:

'I expect that woman will be the last thing civilized by man.'

Some excitement was produced in the bosoms of ladies by so monstrous a scorn of them.

One adventurous person betook herself to the Heralds' College, and there ascertained that a griffin between two wheatsheaves, which stood on the title-page of the book, formed the crest of Sir Austin Absworthy Bearne Feverel, baronet, of Raynham Abbey, in a certain western county folding Thames: a man of wealth and honour, and a somewhat lamentable history.

The outline of the baronet's story was by no means new. He had a wife, and he had a friend. His marriage was for love; his wife was a beauty; his friend was a sort of poet. His wife had his whole heart, and his friend all his confidence. When he selected Denzil Somers from among his college chums, it was not on account of any similarity

of disposition between them, but from his intense worship of genius, which made him overlook the absence of principle in his associate for the sake of such brilliant promise. Denzil had a small patrimony to lead off with, and that he dissipated before he left college; thenceforth, he was dependent upon his admirer, with whom he lived, filling a nominal post of bailiff to the estates, and launching forth verse of some satiric and sentimental quality; for being inclined to vice, and occasionally, and in a quiet way, practising it, he was, of course, a sentimentalist and a satirist, entitled to lash the age and complain of human nature. His earlier poems, published under the pseudonym of Diaper Sandoe, were so pure and bloodless in their love passages, and at the same time so biting in their moral tone, that his reputation was great among the virtuous, who form the larger portion of the English book-buying public. Election seasons called him to ballad-poetry on behalf of the Tory party. Diaper possessed undoubted fluency, but did little, though Sir Austin was ever expecting much of him.

A languishing, inexperienced woman, whose husband in mental and in moral stature is more than the ordinary height above her, and who, now that her first romantic admiration of his lofty bearing has worn off, and her fretful little refinements of taste and sentiment are not instinctively responded to, is thrown into no wholesome household collision with a fluent man, fluent in prose and rhyme. Lady Feverel, when she first entered on her duties at Raynham, was jealous of her husband's friend. By degrees she tolerated him. In time he touched his guitar in her chamber, and they played Rizzio and Mary together.

> For I am not the first who found
> The name of Mary fatal!

says a subsequent sentimental alliterative love-poem of Diaper's.

Such was the outline of the story. But the baronet could fill it up. He had opened his soul to these two. He had been noble love to the one, and to the other perfect friendship. He had bid them be brother and sister whom

he loved, and live a golden age with him at Raynham. In fact, he had been prodigal of the excellences of his nature, which it is not good to be, and, like Timon, he became bankrupt, and fell upon bitterness.

The faithless lady was of no particular family; an orphan daughter of an admiral who educated her on his half-pay, and her conduct struck but at the man whose name she bore.

After five years of marriage, and twelve of friendship, Sir Austin was left to his loneliness with nothing to ease his heart of love upon save a little baby boy in a cradle. He forgave the man: he put him aside as poor for his wrath. The woman he could not forgive; she had sinned every way. Simple ingratitude to a benefactor was a pardonable transgression, for he was not one to recount and crush the culprit under the heap of his good deeds. But her he had raised to be his equal, and he judged her as his equal. She had blackened the world's fair aspect for him.

In the presence of that world, so different to him now, he preserved his wonted demeanour, and made his features a flexible mask. Mrs. Doria Forey, his widowed sister, said that Austin might have retired from his parliamentary career for a time, and given up gaieties and that kind of thing; her opinion, founded on observation of him in public and private, was, that the light thing who had taken flight was but a feather on her brother's Feverel-heart, and his ordinary course of life would be resumed. There are times when common men cannot bear the weight of just so much. Hippias Feverel, one of his brothers, thought him immensely improved by his misfortune, if the loss of such a person could be so designated; and seeing that Hippias received in consequence free quarters at Raynham, and possession of the wing of the abbey she had inhabited, it is profitable to know his thoughts. If the baronet had given two or three blazing dinners in the great hall he would have deceived people generally, as he did his relatives and intimates. He was too sick for that: fit only for passive acting.

The nursemaid waking in the night beheld a solitary figure darkening a lamp above her little sleeping charge,

and became so used to the sight as never to wake with a start. One night she was strangely aroused by a sound of sobbing. The baronet stood beside the cot in his long black cloak and travelling cap. His fingers shaded a lamp, and reddened against the fitful darkness that ever and anon went leaping up the wall. She could hardly believe her senses to see the austere gentleman, dead silent, dropping tear upon tear before her eyes. She lay stone-still in a trance of terror and mournfulness, mechanically counting the tears as they fell, one by one. The hidden face, the fall and flash of those heavy drops in the light of the lamp he held, the upright, awful figure, agitated at regular intervals like a piece of clockwork by the low murderous catch of his breath: it was so piteous to her poor human nature that her heart began wildly palpitating. Involuntarily the poor girl cried out to him: 'Oh, sir!' and fell a-weeping. Sir Austin turned the lamp on her pillow and harshly bade her go to sleep, striding from the room forthwith. He dismissed her with a purse the next day.

Once, when he was seven years old, the little fellow woke up at night to see a lady bending over him. He talked of this the next day, but it was treated as a dream; until in the course of the day his Uncle Algernon was driven home from Lobourne cricket ground with a broken leg. Then it was recollected that there was a family ghost; and, though no member of the family believed in the ghost, none would have given up a circumstance that testified to its existence; for to possess a ghost is a distinction above titles.

Algernon Feverel lost his leg, and ceased to be a gentleman in the Guards. Of the other uncles of young Richard, Cuthbert, the sailor, perished in a spirited boat expedition against a slaving negro chief up the Niger. Some of the gallant lieutenant's trophies of war decorated the little boy's play-shed at Raynham, and he bequeathed his sword to Richard, whose hero he was. The diplomatist and beau, Vivian, ended his flutterings from flower to flower by making an improper marriage, as is the fate of many a beau, and was struck out of the list of visitors. Algernon generally occupied the baronet's disused town house, a

wretched being dividing his time between horse and card exercise: possessed it was said, of the absurd notion that a man who has lost his balance by losing his leg may regain it by sticking to the bottle. At least, whenever he and his brother Hippias got together, they never failed to try whether one leg, or two, stood the bottle best. Much of a puritan as Sir Austin was in his habits, he was too good a host, and too thorough a gentleman, to impose them upon his guests. The brothers, and other relatives, might do as they would while they did not disgrace the name, and then it was final: they must depart to behold his countenance no more.

Algernon Feverel was a simple man, who felt, subsequent to his misfortune, as he had perhaps dimly fancied it before, that his career lay in his legs, and was now irrevocably cut short. He taught the boy boxing, and shooting, and the arts of fence, and superintended the direction of his animal vigour with a melancholy vivacity. The remaining energies of Algernon's mind were devoted to animadversions on swift bowling. He preached it over the county, struggling through laborious literary compositions, addressed to sporting newspapers, on 'The Decline of Cricket.' It was Algernon who witnessed and chronicled young Richard's first fight, which was with young Tom Blaize of Belthorpe Farm, three years the boy's senior.

Hippias Feverel was once thought to be the genius of the family. It was his ill luck to have strong appetites and a weak stomach; and, as one is not altogether fit for the battle of life who is engaged in a perpetual contention with his dinner, Hippias forsook his prospects at the Bar, and, in the embraces of dyspepsia, compiled his ponderous work on the fairy mythology of Europe. He had little to do with the Hope of Raynham beyond what he endured from his juvenile tricks.

A venerable lady, known as Great-Aunt Grantley, who had money to bequeath to the heir, occupied with Hippias the background of the house and shared her caudles with him. These two were seldom seen till the dinner-hour, for which they were all day preparing, and probably all night remembering, for the Eighteenth Century was an

admirable trencherman, and cast age aside while there was a dish on the table.

Mrs. Doria Forey was the eldest of the three sisters of the baronet, a florid affable woman, with fine teeth, exceedingly fine, light wavy hair, a Norman nose, and a reputation for understanding men; and that, with these practical creatures, always means the art of managing them. She had married an expectant younger son of a good family, who deceased before the fulfilment of his prospects; and, casting about in her mind the future chances of her little daughter and sole child, Clare, she marked down a probability. The far sight, the deep determination, the resolute perseverance of her sex, where a daughter is to be provided for and a man to be overthrown, instigated her to invite herself to Raynham, where, with that daughter, she fixed herself.

The other two Feverel ladies were the wife of Colonel Wentworth and the widow of Mr. Justice Harley: and the only thing remarkable about them was that they were mothers of sons of some distinction.

Austin Wentworth's story was of that wretched character which to be comprehended, that justice should be dealt him, must be told out and openly; which no one dares now do.

For a fault in early youth, redeemed by him nobly, according to his light, he was condemned to undergo the world's harsh judgment: not for the fault—for its atonement.

'. . . married his mother's housemaid,' whispered Mrs. Doria, with a ghastly look, and a shudder at young men of republican sentiments, which he was reputed to entertain.

'The compensation for injustice,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, 'is, that in that dark ordeal we gather the worthiest around us.'

And the baronet's fair friend, Lady Blandish, and some few true men and women, held Austin Wentworth high.

He did not live with his wife; and Sir Austin, whose mind was bent on the future of our species, reproached him with being barren to posterity, while knaves were propagating.

The principal characteristic of the second nephew,

Adrian Harley, was his sagacity. He was essentially the wise youth, both in counsel and in action.

'In action,' *The Pilgrim's Scrip* observes, 'wisdom goes by majorities.'

Adrian had an instinct for the majority, and, as the world invariably found him enlisted in its ranks, his appellation of wise youth was acquiesced in without irony.

The wise youth, then, had the world with him, but no friends. Nor did he wish for those troublesome appendages of success. He caused himself to be required by people who could serve him; feared by such as could injure. Not that he went out of the way to secure his end, or risked the expense of a plot. He did the work as easily as he ate his daily bread. Adrian was an epicurean; one whom Epicurus would have scourged out of his garden, certainly: an epicurean of our modern notions. To satisfy his appetites without rashly staking his character, was the wise youth's problem for life. He had no intimates except Gibbon and Horace, and the society of these fine aristocrats of literature helped him to accept humanity as it had been, and was; a supreme ironic procession, with laughter of gods in the background. Why not laughter of mortals also? Adrian had his laugh in his comfortable corner. He possessed peculiar attributes of a heathen god. He was a disposer of men: he was polished, luxurious, and happy—at their cost. He lived in eminent self-content, as one lying on soft cloud, lapped in sunshine. Nor Jove, nor Apollo, cast eye upon the maids of earth with cooler fire of selection, or pursued them in the covert with more sacred impunity. And he enjoyed his reputation for virtue as something additional. Stolen fruits are said to be sweet; undeserved rewards are exquisite.

The best of it was that Adrian made no pretences. He did not solicit the favourable judgment of the world. Nature and he attempted no other concealment than the ordinary mask men wear. And yet the world would proclaim him moral, as well as wise, and the pleasing converse every way of his disgraced cousin Austin.

In a word, Adrian Harley had mastered his philosophy at the early age of one-and-twenty. Many would be glad

to say the same at that age twice told: they carry in their breasts a burden with which Adrian's was not loaded. Mrs. Doria was nearly right about his heart. A singular mishap (at his birth, possibly, or before it) had unseated that organ, and shaken it down to his stomach, where it was a much lighter, nay, an inspiring weight, and encouraged him merrily onward. Throned there it looked on little that did not arrive to gratify it. Already that region was a trifle prominent in the person of the wise youth, and carried, as it were, the flag of his philosophical tenets in front of him. He was charming after dinner, with men or with women: delightfully sarcastic: perhaps a little too unscrupulous in his moral tone, but that his moral reputation belied him, and it must be set down to generosity of disposition.

Such was Adrian Harley, another of Sir Austin's intellectual favourites, chosen from mankind to superintend the education of his son at Raynham. Adrian had been destined for the Church. He did not enter into Orders. He and the baronet had a conference together one day, and from that time Adrian became a fixture in the abbey. His father died in his promising son's college term, bequeathing him nothing but his legal complexion, and Adrian became stipendiary officer in his uncle's household.

A playfellow of Richard's occasionally, and the only comrade of his age that he ever saw, was Master Ripton Thompson, the son of Sir Austin's solicitor, a boy without a character.

A comrade of some description was necessary, for Richard was neither to go to school nor to college. Sir Austin considered that the schools were corrupt, and maintained that young lads might by parental vigilance be kept pretty secure from the serpent until Eve sided with him: a period that might be deferred, he said. He had a system of education for his son. How it worked we shall see.

CHAPTER II

SHOWING HOW THE FATES SELECTED THE FOURTEENTH BIRTHDAY TO TRY THE STRENGTH OF THE SYSTEM

OCTOBER shone royally on Richard's fourteenth birthday. The brown beechwoods and golden birches glowed to a brilliant sun. Banks of moveless cloud hung about the horizon, mounded to the west, where slept the wind. Promise of a great day for Raynham, as it proved to be, though not in the manner marked out.

Already archery booths and cricketing tents were rising on the lower grounds towards the river, whither the lads of Bursley and Lobourne, in boats and in carts, shouting for a day of ale and honour, jogged merrily to match themselves anew, and pluck at the living laurel from each other's brows, like manly Britons. The whole park was beginning to be astir and resound with holiday cries. Sir Austin Feverel, a thorough good Tory, was no game-preserver, and could be popular whenever he chose, which Sir Miles Papworth, on the other side of the river, a fast-handed Whig and a terror to poachers, never could be. Half the village of Lobourne was seen trooping through the avenues of the park. Fiddlers and gipsies clamoured at the gates for admission: white smocks, and slate, surmounted by hats of serious brim, and now and then a scarlet cloak, smacking of the old country, dotted the grassy sweeps to the levels.

And all the time the star of these festivities was receding further and further, and eclipsing himself with his reluctant serf Ripton, who kept asking what they were to do and where they were going, and how late it was in the day, and suggesting that the lads of Lobourne would be calling out for them, and Sir Austin requiring their presence, without getting any attention paid to his misery or

remonstrances. For Richard had been requested by his father to submit to medical examination like a boor enlisting for a soldier, and he was in great wrath.

He was flying as though he would have flown from the shameful thought of what had been asked of him. By and by he communicated his sentiments to Ripton, who said they were those of a girl: an offensive remark, remembering which, Richard, after they had borrowed a couple of guns at the bailiff's farm, and Ripton had fired badly, called his friend a fool.

Feeling that circumstances were making him look wonderfully like one, Ripton lifted his head and retorted defiantly, 'I 'm not!'

This angry contradiction, so very uncalled for, annoyed Richard, who was still smarting at the loss of the birds, owing to Ripton's bad shot, and was really the injured party. He therefore bestowed the abusive epithet on Ripton anew, and with increase of emphasis.

'You shan't call me so, then, whether I am or not,' says Ripton, and sucks his lips.

This was becoming personal. Richard sent up his brows, and stared at his defier an instant. He then informed him that he certainly should call him so, and would not object to call him so twenty times.

'Do it, and see!' returns Ripton, rocking on his feet, and breathing quick.

With a gravity of which only boys and other barbarians are capable, Richard went through the entire number, stressing the epithet to increase the defiance and avoid monotony, as he progressed, while Ripton bobbed his head every time in assent, as it were, to his comrade's accuracy, and as a record for his profound humiliation. The dog they had with them gazed at the extraordinary performance with interrogating wags of the tail.

Twenty times, duly and deliberately, Richard repeated the obnoxious word.

At the twentieth solemn iteration of Ripton's capital shortcoming, Ripton delivered a smart back-hander on Richard's mouth, and squared precipitately; perhaps sorry when the deed was done, for he was a kind-hearted lad,

and as Richard simply bowed in acknowledgment of the blow he thought he had gone too far. He did not know the young gentleman he was dealing with. Richard was extremely cool.

'Shall we fight here?' he said.

'Anywhere you like,' replied Ripton.

'A little more into the wood, I think. We may be interrupted.' And Richard led the way with a courteous reserve that somewhat chilled Ripton's ardour for the contest. On the skirts of the wood, Richard threw off his jacket and waistcoat, and, quite collected, waited for Ripton to do the same. The latter boy was flushed and restless; older and broader, but not so tight-limbed and well-set. The gods, sole witnesses of their battle, betted dead against him. Richard had mounted the white cockade of the Feverels, and there was a look in him that asked for tough work to extinguish. His brows, slightly lined upward at the temples, converging to a knot about the well-set straight nose; his full grey eyes, open nostrils, and planted feet, and a gentlemanly air of calm and alertness, formed a spirited picture of a young combatant. As for Ripton, he was all abroad, and fought in schoolboy style—that is, he rushed at the foe head foremost, and struck like a windmill. He was a lumpy boy. When he did hit, he made himself felt; but he was at the mercy of science. To see him come dashing in, blinking and puffing and whirling his arms abroad while the felling blow went straight between them, you perceived that he was fighting a fight of desperation, and knew it. For the dreaded alternative glared him in the face, that if he yielded, he must look like what he had been twenty times calumniously called; and he would die rather than yield, and swing his windmill till he dropped. Poor boy! he dropped frequently. The gallant fellow fought for appearances, and down he went. The gods favour one of two parties. Prince Turnus was a noble youth; but he had not Pallas at his elbow. Ripton was a capital boy; he had no science. He could not prove he was not a fool! When one comes to think of it, Ripton did choose the only possible way, and we should all of us have considerable

difficulty in proving the negative by any other. Ripton came on the unerring fist again and again; and if it was true, as he said in short, colloquial gasps, that he required as much beating as an egg to be beaten thoroughly, a fortunate interruption alone saved our friend from resembling that substance. The boys heard summoning voices, and beheld Mr. Morton of Poer Hall and Austin Wentworth stepping towards them.

A truce was sounded, jackets were caught up, guns shouldered, and off they trotted in concert through the depths of the wood, not stopping till that and half a dozen fields and a larch plantation were well behind them.

When they halted to take breath, there was a mutual study of faces. Ripton's was much discoloured, and looked fiercer with its natural war-paint than the boy felt. Nevertheless, he squared up dauntlessly on the new ground, and Richard, whose wrath was appeased, could not refrain from asking him whether he had not really had enough.

'Never!' shouts the noble enemy.

'Well, look here,' said Richard, appealing to common sense, 'I 'm tired of knocking you down. I 'll say you 're not a fool, if you 'll give me your hand.'

Ripton demurred an instant to consult with Honour, who bade him catch at his chance.

He held out his hand. 'There!' and the boys grasped hands and were fast friends. Ripton had gained his point, and Richard decidedly had the best of it. So they were on equal ground. Both could claim a victory, which was all the better for their friendship.

Ripton washed his face and comforted his nose at a brook, and was now ready to follow his friend wherever he chose to lead. They continued to beat about for birds. The birds on the Raynham estates were found singularly cunning, and repeatedly eluded the aim of these prime shots, so they pushed their expedition into the lands of their neighbours, in search of a stupider race, happily oblivious of the laws and conditions of trespass; unconscious, too, that they were poaching on the demesne of the notorious Farmer Blaize, the free-trade farmer under the shield of the Papworths, no worshipper of the griffin

between two wheatsheaves; destined to be much allied with Richard's fortunes from beginning to end. Farmer Blaize hated poachers, and especially young chaps poaching, who did it mostly from impudence. He heard the audacious shots popping right and left, and going forth to have a glimpse at the intruders, and observing their size, swore he would teach my gentlemen a thing, lords or no lords.

Richard had brought down a beautiful cock-pheasant, and was exulting over it, when the farmer's portentous figure burst upon them, cracking an avenging horsewhip. His salute was ironical.

'Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?'

'Just bagged a splendid bird!' radiant Richard informed him.

'Oh!' Farmer Blaize gave an admonitory flick of the whip.

'Just let me clap eye on 't, then.'

'Say, please,' interposed Ripton, who was not blind to doubtful aspects.

Farmer Blaize threw up his chin, and grinned grimly.

'Please to you, sir? Why, my chap, you looks as if ye didn't much mind what come t' yer nose, I reckon. You looks an old poacher, you do. Tall ye what 'tis!' He changed his banter to business. 'That bird 's mine! Now you jest hand him over, and sheer off, you damn young scoundrels! I know ye!' And he became exceedingly opprobrious, and uttered contempt of the name of Feverel.

Richard opened his eyes.

'If you wants to be horsewhipped, you 'll stay where y' are!' continued the farmer. 'Giles Blaize never stands nonsense!'

'Then we 'll stay,' quoth Richard.

'Good! so be 't! If you will have 't, have 't, my men!'

As a preparatory measure, Farmer Blaize seized a wing of the bird, on which both boys flung themselves desperately, and secured it minus the pinion.

'That 's your game,' cried the farmer. 'Here 's a taste of horsewhip for ye. I never stands nonsense!' and

sweetch went the mighty whip, well swayed. The boys tried to close with him. He kept his distance and lashed without mercy. Black blood was made by Farmer Blaize that day! The boys wriggled, in spite of themselves. It was like a relentless serpent coiling, and biting, and stinging their young veins to madness. Probably they felt the disgrace of the contortions they were made to go through more than the pain, but the pain was fierce, for the farmer laid about from a practised arm, and did not consider that he had done enough till he was well breathed and his ruddy jowl inflamed. He paused, to receive the remainder of the cock-pheasant in his face.

'Take your beastly bird,' cried Richard.

'Money, my lads, and interest,' roared the farmer, lashing out again.

Shameful as it was to retreat, there was but that course open to them. They decided to surrender the field.

'Look, you big brute!'—Richard shook his gun, hoarse with passion—'I 'd have shot you, if I 'd been loaded. Mind! if I come across you when I 'm loaded, you coward, I 'll fire!'

The un-English nature of this threat exasperated Farmer Blaize, and he pressed the pursuit in time to bestow a few farewell stripes as they were escaping tight-breeched into neutral territory. At the hedge they parleyed a minute, the farmer to inquire if they had had a mortal good tanning and were satisfied, for when they wanted a further instalment of the same they were to come for it to Belthorpe Farm, and there it was in pickle: the boys meantime exploding in menaces and threats of vengeance, on which the farmer contemptuously turned his back. Ripton had already stocked an armful of flints for the enjoyment of a little skirmishing. Richard, however, knocked them all out, saying, 'No! Gentlemen don't fling stones; leave that to the blackguards.'

'Just one shy at him!' pleaded Ripton, with his eyes on Farmer Blaize's broad mark, and his whole mind drunken with a sudden revelation of the advantages of light troops in opposition to heavies.

'No,' said Richard, imperatively, 'no stones,' and

marched briskly away. Ripton followed with a sigh. His leader's magnanimity was wholly beyond him. A good spanking mark at the farmer would have relieved Master Ripton; it would have done nothing to console Richard Feverel for the ignominy he had been compelled to submit to. Ripton was familiar with the rod, a monster much despoiled of his terrors by intimacy. Birch-fever was past with this boy. The horrible sense of shame, self-loathing, universal hatred, impotent vengeance, as if the spirit were steeped in abysmal blackness, which comes upon a courageous and sensitive youth condemned for the first time to taste this piece of fleshly bitterness, and suffer what he feels is a defilement, Ripton had weathered and forgotten. He was seasoned wood, and took the world pretty wisely; not reckless of castigation, as some boys become, nor over-sensitive as to dishonour, as his friend and comrade beside him was.

Richard's blood was poisoned. He had the fever on him severely. He would not allow stone-flinging, because it was a habit of his to discountenance it. Mere gentle-manly considerations had scarce shielded Farmer Blaize, and certain very ungentlemanly schemes were coming to ghastly heads in the tumult of his brain; rejected solely from their glaring impracticability even to his young intelligence. A sweeping and consummate vengeance for the indignity alone should satisfy him. Something tre-mendous must be done, and done without delay. At one moment he thought of killing all the farmer's cattle; next of killing him; challenging him to single combat with the arms, and according to the fashion of gentlemen. But the farmer was a coward; he would refuse. Then he, Richard Feverel, would stand by the farmer's bedside and rouse him; rouse him to fight with powder and ball in his own chamber, in the cowardly midnight, where he might tremble, but dare not refuse.

'Lord!' cried simple Ripton, while these hopeful plots were raging in his comrade's brain, now sparkling for immediate execution, and anon lapsing disdainfully dark in their chances of fulfilment, 'how I wish you 'd have let me notch him, Ricky! I 'm a safe shot. I never miss.

I should feel quite jolly if I 'd spanked him once. We should have had the best of him at that game. I say!' and a sharp thought drew Ripton's ideas nearer home, 'I wonder whether my nose is as bad as he says! Where can I see myself?'

To these exclamations Richard was deaf, and he trudged steadily forward, facing but one object.

After tearing through innumerable hedges, leaping fences, jumping dykes, penetrating brambly copses, and getting dirty, ragged, and tired, Ripton awoke from his dream of Farmer Blaize and a blue nose to the vivid consciousness of hunger; and this grew with the rapidity of light upon him, till in the course of another minute he was enduring the extremes of famine, and ventured to question his leader whither he was being conducted. Raynham was out of sight. They were a long way down the valley, miles from Lobourne, in a country of sour pools, yellow brooks, rank pasturage, desolate heath. Solitary cows were seen; the smoke of a mud cottage; a cart piled with peat; a donkey grazing at leisure, oblivious of an unkind world; geese by a horse-pond, gabbling as in the first loneliness of creation; uncooked things that a famishing boy cannot possibly care for, and must despise. Ripton was in despair.

'Where *are* you going to?' he inquired with a voice of the last time of asking, and halted resolutely.

Richard now broke his silence to reply: 'Anywhere.'

'Anywhere!' Ripton took up the moody word. 'But ain't you awfully hungry?' he gasped vehemently, in a way that showed the total emptiness of his stomach.

'No,' was Richard's brief response.

'Not hungry!' Ripton's amazement lent him increased vehemence. 'Why, you haven't had anything to eat since breakfast! Not hungry? I declare I 'm starving. I feel such a gnawing I could eat dry bread and cheese!'

Richard sneered; not for reasons that would have actuated a similar demonstration of the philosopher.

'Come,' cried Ripton, 'at all events, tell us where you 're going to stop?'

Richard faced about to make a querulous retort. The

injured and hapless visage that met his eye disarmed him. The lad's nose, though not exactly of the dreaded hue, was really becoming discoloured. To upbraid him would be cruel. Richard lifted his head, surveyed the position, and exclaiming, 'Here!' dropped down on a withered bank, leaving Ripton to contemplate him as a puzzle whose every new move was a worse perplexity.

CHAPTER III

THE MAGIAN CONFLICT

AMONG boys there are laws of honour and chivalrous codes, not written or formally taught, but intuitively understood by all, and invariably acted upon by the loyal and the true. The race is not nearly civilized, we must remember. Thus, not to follow your leader whithersoever he may think proper to lead; to back out of an expedition because the end of it frowns dubious, and the present fruit of it is discomfort; to quit a comrade on the road, and return home without him: these are tricks which no boy of spirit would be guilty of, let him come to any description of mortal grief in consequence. Better so than have his own conscience denouncing him sneak. Some boys who behave boldly enough are not troubled by this conscience, and the eyes and the lips of their fellows have to supply the deficiency. They do it with just as haunting, and even more horrible pertinacity, than the inner voice, and the result, if the probation be not very severe and searching, is the same. The leader can rely on the faithfulness of his host: the comrade is sworn to serve. Master Ripton Thompson was naturally loyal. The idea of turning off and forsaking his friend never once crossed his mind, though his condition was desperate, and his friend's behaviour that of a bedlamite. He announced several times impatiently that they would be too late for dinner. His friend did not budge. Dinner seemed nothing to him. There he lay plucking grass, and patting the old dog's nose, as if incapable of conceiving what a thing hunger was. Ripton took half a dozen turns up and down, and at last flung down himself beside the taciturn boy, accepting his fate.

Now, the chance that works for certain purposes sent a smart shower from the sinking sun, and the wet sent

two strangers for shelter in the lane behind the hedge where the boys reclined. One was a travelling tinker, who lit a pipe and spread a tawny umbrella. The other was a burly young countryman, pipeless and tentless. They saluted with a nod, and began recounting for each other's benefit the day-long doings of the weather, as it had affected their individual experience and followed their prophecies. Both had anticipated and foretold a bit of rain before night, and therefore both welcomed the wet with satisfaction. A monotonous between-whiles kind of talk they kept droning, in harmony with the still hum of the air. From the weather theme they fell upon the blessings of tobacco; how it was the poor man's friend, his company, his consolation, his comfort, his refuge at night, his first thought in the morning.

'Better than a wife!' chuckled the tinker. 'No curtain-lecturin' with a pipe. Your pipe ain't a shrew.'

'That be it!' the other chimed in. 'Your pipe doan't mak' ye out wi' all the cash Saturday evenin'.'

'Take one,' said the tinker, in the enthusiasm of the moment, handing a grimy short clay. Speed-the-Plough filled from the tinker's pouch, and continued his praises.

'Penny a day, and there y' are, primed! Better than a wife? Ha, ha!'

'And you can get rid of it, if ye wants for to, and when ye wants,' added tinker.

'So ye can!' Speed-the-Plough took him up. 'And ye doan't want for to. Leastways, t'other case. I means pipe.'

'And,' continued tinker, comprehending him perfectly, 'it don't bring repentance after it.'

'Not nohow, master, it doan't! And'—Speed-the-Plough cocked his eye—'it doan't eat up half the victuals, your pipe doan't.'

Here the honest yeoman gesticulated his keen sense of a clincher, which the tinker acknowledged; and having, so to speak, sealed up the subject by saying the best thing that could be said, the two smoked for some time in silence to the drip and patter of the shower.

Ripton solaced his wretchedness by watching them

through the briar hedge. He saw the tinker stroking a white cat, and appealing to her, every now and then, as his missus, for an opinion or a confirmation; and he thought that a curious sight. Speed-the-Plough was stretched at full length, with his boots in the rain, and his head amidst the tinker's pots, smoking, profoundly contemplative. The minutes seemed to be taken up alternately by the grey puffs from their mouths.

It was the tinker who renewed the colloquy. Said he, 'Times is bad!'

His companion assented, 'Sure-ly!'

'But it somehow comes round right,' resumed the tinker. 'Why, look here. Where 's the good o' moping? I sees it all come round right and tight. Now I travels about. I 've got my beat. 'Casion calls me t'other day to Newcastle! Eh?'

'Coals!' ejaculated Speed-the-Plough sonorously.

'Coals!' echoed the tinker. 'You ask what I goes there for, mayhap? Never you mind. One sees a mort o' life in my trade. Not for coals it isn't. And I don't carry 'em there, neither. Anyhow, I comes back. London 's my mark. Says I, I 'll see a bit o' the sea, and steps aboard a collier. We were as nigh wrecked as the prophet Paul.'

'-A—who 's him?' the other wished to know.

'Read your Bible,' said the tinker. 'We pitched and tossed—'tain't that game at sea 'tis on land, I can tell ye! I thinks, down we 're agoing—say your prayers, Bob Tiles! That was a night, to be sure! But God 's above the devil, and here I am, ye see.'

Speed-the-Plough lurched round on his elbow and regarded him indifferently. 'D' ye call that doctrin'? He bean't al'ays, or I shoo'n't be scrapin' my heels wi' nothin' to do, and, what 's warse, nothin' to eat. Why, look heer. Luck 's luck, and bad luck 's the contrary. Varmer Bollop, t'other day, has 's rick burnt down. Next night his gran'ry 's burnt. What do he tak' and go and do? He takes and goes and hangs unsel', and turns us out of his employ. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks, or I can't make out the reckonin'.'

The tinker cleared his throat, and said it was a bad case.

'And a darn'd bad case. I 'll tak' my oath on 't!' cried Speed-the-Plough. 'Well, look heer! Heer 's another darn'd bad case. I threshed for Varmer Blaize—Blaize o' Beltharpe—afore I goes to Varmer Bollop. Varmer Blaize misses pilkins. He swears our chaps steals pilkins. 'Twarn't me steals 'em. What do *he* tak' and go and do? He takes and tarns us off, me and another, neck and crop, to scuffle about and starve, for all *he* keers. God warn't above the devil then, I thinks. Not nohow, as I can see!'

The tinker shook his head, and said that was a bad case also.

'And you can't mend it,' added Speed-the-Plough. 'It 's bad, and there it be. But I 'll tell ye what, master. Bad wants payin' for.' He nodded and winked mysteriously. 'Bad has its wages as well 's honest work, I 'm thinkin'. Varmer Bollop I don't owe no grudge to; Varmer Blaize I do. And I shud like to stick a lucifer in his rick some dry, windy night.' Speed-the-Plough screwed up an eye villainously. 'He wants hittin' in the wind,—jest where the pocket is, master, do Varmer Blaize, and he 'll cry out, "Oh, Lor'!" Varmer Blaize will. You won't get the better o' Varmer Blaize by no means, as I makes out, if ye doan't hit into him jest there.'

The tinker sent a rapid succession of white clouds from his mouth, and said that would be taking the devil's side of a bad case. Speed-the-Plough observed energetically that, if Farmer Blaize was on the other, he should be on that side.

There was a young gentleman close by, who thought with him. The Hope of Raynham had lent a careless half-compelled attention to the foregoing dialogue, wherein a common labourer and a travelling tinker had propounded and discussed one of the most ancient theories of transmundane dominion and influence on mundane affairs. He now started to his feet, and came tearing through the briar hedge, calling out for one of them to direct them the nearest road to Bursley. The tinker was kindling preparations for his tea, under the tawny umbrella. A loaf was set forth, on which Ripton's eyes, stuck in the edge,

fastened ravenously. Speed-the-Plough volunteered information that Bursley was a good three mile from where they stood, and a good eight mile from Lobourne.

'I 'll give you half a crown for that loaf, my good fellow,' said Richard to the tinker.

'It 's a bargain,' quoth the tinker, 'eh, missus?'

His cat replied by humping her back at the dog.

The half-crown was tossed down, and Ripton, who had just succeeded in freeing his limbs from the briar, prickly as a hedgehog, collared the loaf.

'Those young squires be sharp-set, and no mistake,' said the tinker to his companion. 'Come! we 'll to Bursley after 'em, and talk it out over a pot o' beer.' Speed-the-Plough was nothing loath, and in a short time they were following the two lads on the road to Bursley, while a horizontal blaze shot across the autumn land from the western edge of the rain-cloud.

CHAPTER IV

ARSON

SEARCH for the missing boys had been made everywhere over Raynham, and Sir Austin was in grievous discontent. None had seen them save Austin Wentworth and Mr. Morton. The baronet sat construing their account of the flight of the lads when they were hailed, and resolved it into an act of rebellion on the part of his son. At dinner he drank the young heir's health in ominous silence. Adrian Harley stood up in his place to propose the health. His speech was a fine piece of rhetoric. He warmed in it till, after the Ciceronic model, inanimate objects were personified, and Richard's table-napkin and vacant chair were invoked to follow the steps of a peerless father, and uphold with his dignity the honour of the Feverels. Austin Wentworth, whom a soldier's death compelled to take his father's place in support of the toast, was tame after such magniloquence. But the reply, the thanks which young Richard should have delivered in person were not forthcoming. Adrian's oratory had given but a momentary life to napkin and chair. The company of honoured friends, and aunts, and uncles, and remotest cousins, were glad to disperse and seek amusement in music and tea. Sir Austin did his utmost to be hospitably cheerful, and requested them to dance. If he had desired them to laugh he would have been obeyed, and in as hearty a manner.

'How *triste*!' said Mrs. Doria Forey to Lobourne's curate, as that most enamoured automaton went through his paces beside her with professional stiffness.

'One who does not suffer can hardly assent,' the curate answered, basking in her beams.

'Ah, you are good!' exclaimed the lady. 'Look at my Clare. She will not dance on her cousin's birthday with any one but him. What are we to do to enliven these people?'

'Alas, madam! you cannot do for all what you do for

one,' the curate sighed, and wherever she wandered in discourse, drew her back with silken strings to gaze on his enamoured soul.

He was the only gratified stranger present. The others had designs on the young heir. Lady Attenbury of Longford House had brought her highly-polished specimen of market-ware, the Lady Juliana Jaye, for a first introduction to him, thinking he had arrived at an age to estimate and pine for her black eyes and pretty, pert mouth. The Lady Juliana had to pair off with a dapper Papworth, and her mamma was subjected to the gallantries of Sir Miles, who talked land and steam-engines to her till she was sick, and had to be impertinent in self-defence. Lady Blandish, the delightful widow, sat apart with Adrian, and enjoyed his sarcasms on the company. By ten at night the poor show ended, and the rooms were dark, dark as the prognostics multitudinously hinted by the disappointed and chilled guests concerning the probable future of the Hope of Raynham. Little Clare kissed her mamma, curtsied to the lingering curate, and went to bed like a very good girl. Immediately the maid had departed, little Clare deliberately exchanged night attire for that of day. She was noted as an obedient child. Her light was always allowed to burn in her room for half an hour, to counteract her fears of the dark. She took the light, and stole on tiptoe to Richard's room. No Richard was there. She peeped in further and further. A trifling agitation of the curtains shot her back through the door and along the passage to her own bedchamber with extreme expedition. She was not much alarmed, but feeling guilty she was on her guard. In a short time she was prowling about the passages again. Richard had slighted and offended the little lady, and was to be asked whether he did not repent such conduct toward his cousin; not to be asked whether he had forgotten to receive his birthday kiss from her; for, if he did not choose to remember that, Miss Clare would never remind him of it, and to-night should be his last chance of a reconciliation. Thus she meditated, sitting on a stair, and presently heard Richard's voice below in the hall, shouting for supper.

'Master Richard has returned,' old Benson the butler tolled out intelligence to Sir Austin.

'Well?' said the baronet.

'He complains of being hungry,' the butler hesitated, with a look of solemn disgust.

'Let him eat.'

Heavy Benson hesitated still more as he announced that the boy had called for wine. It was an unprecedented thing. Sir Austin's brows were portending an arch, but Adrian suggested that he wanted possibly to drink his birthday, and claret was conceded.

The boys were in the vortex of a partridge-pie when Adrian strolled in to them. They had now changed characters. Richard was uproarious. He drank a health with every glass; his cheeks were flushed and his eyes brilliant. Ripton looked very much like a rogue on the tremble of detection, but his honest hunger and the partridge-pie shielded him awhile from Adrian's scrutinizing glance. Adrian saw there was matter for study, if it were only on Master Ripton's betraying nose, and sat down to hear and mark.

'Good sport, gentlemen, I trust to hear?' he began his quiet banter, and provoked a loud peal of laughter from Richard.

'Ha, ha! I say, Rip: "Havin' good sport, gentlemen, are ye?" You remember the farmer! Your health, parson! We haven't had our sport yet. We 're going to have some first-rate sport. Oh, well! we haven't much show of birds. We shot for pleasure, and returned them to the proprietors. You 're fond of game, parson! Ripton is a dead shot in what Cousin Austin calls the kingdom of "would-have-done" and "might-have-been." Up went the birds, and cries Rip, "I 've forgotten to load!" Oh, ho! Rip! some more claret. Do just leave that nose of yours alone. Your health, Ripton Thompson! The birds hadn't the decency to wait for him, and so, parson, it 's their fault, and not Rip's, you haven't a dozen brace at your feet. What have you been doing at home, Cousin Rady?'

'Playing *Hamlet*, in the absence of the Prince of

Denmark. The day without you, my dear boy, must be dull, you know.'

> 'He speaks: can I trust what he says is sincere?
> There 's an edge to his smile that cuts much like a sneer.

Sandoe's poems! You know the couplet, Mr. Rady. Why shouldn't I quote Sandoe? You know you like him, Rady. But, if you 've missed me, I 'm sorry. Rip and I have had a beautiful day. We 've made new acquaintances. We 've seen the world. I 'm the monkey that has seen the world, and I am going to tell you all about it. First, there 's a gentleman who takes a rifle for a fowling-piece. Next, there 's a farmer who warns everybody, gentleman and beggar, off his premises. Next, there 's a tinker and a ploughman, who think that God is always fighting with the devil which shall command the kingdoms of the earth. The tinker 's for God, and the ploughman——'

'I 'll drink your health, Ricky,' said Adrian, interrupting.

'Oh, I forgot, parson—I mean no harm, Adrian. I 'm only telling what I 've heard.'

'No harm, my dear boy,' returned Adrian. 'I 'm perfectly aware that Zoroaster is not dead. You have been listening to a common creed. Drink the Fire-worshippers, if you will.'

'Here 's to Zoroaster, then!' cried Richard. 'I say, Rippy! we 'll drink the Fire-worshippers to-night, won't we?'

A fearful conspiratorial frown, that would not have disgraced Guido Fawkes, was darted back from the plastic features of Master Ripton.

Richard gave his lungs loud play.

'Why, what did you say about Blazes, Rippy? Didn't you say it was fun?'

Another hideous and silencing frown was Ripton's answer. Adrian watched the innocent youths, and knew that there was talking under the table. 'See,' thought he, 'this boy has tasted his first scraggy morsel of life to-day, and already he talks like an old stager, and has, if I mistake not, been acting too. My respected chief,' he apostrophized Sir Austin, 'combustibles are only the

more dangerous for compression. This boy will be ravenous for Earth when he is let loose, and very soon make his share of it look as foolish as yonder game-pie!'—a prophecy Adrian kept to himself.

Uncle Algernon shambled in to see his nephew before the supper was finished, and his more genial presence brought out a little of the plot.

'Look here, uncle!' said Richard. 'Would you let a churlish old brute of a farmer strike you without making him suffer for it?'

'I fancy I should return the compliment, my lad,' replied his uncle.

'Of course you would! So would I. And he shall suffer for it.' The boy looked savage, and his uncle patted him down.

'I 've boxed his son; I 'll box him,' said Richard, shouting for more wine.

'What, boy! Is it old Blaize has been putting you up?'

'Never mind, uncle!' The boy nodded mysteriously.

Look there! Adrian read on Ripton's face, he says 'never mind,' and lets it out!

'Did we beat to-day, uncle?'

'Yes, boy; and we 'd beat them any day they bowl fair. I 'd beat them on one leg. There 's only Natkins and Featherdene among them worth a farthing.'

'We beat!' cries Richard. 'Then we 'll have some more wine, and drink their healths.'

The bell was rung; wine ordered. Presently comes in Heavy Benson, to say supplies are cut off. One bottle, and no more. The captain whistled; Adrian shrugged.

The bottle, however, was procured by Adrian subsequently. He liked studying intoxicated urchins.

One subject was at Richard's heart, about which he was reserved in the midst of his riot. Too proud to inquire how his father had taken his absence, he burned to hear whether he was in disgrace. He led to it repeatedly, and it was constantly evaded by Algernon and Adrian. At last, when the boy declared a desire to wish his father good-night, Adrian had to tell him that he was to go straight to bed from the supper-table. Young Richard's face fell

at that, and his gaiety forsook him. He marched to his room without another word.

Adrian gave Sir Austin an able version of his son's behaviour and adventures; dwelling upon this sudden taciturnity when he heard of his father's resolution not to see him. The wise youth saw that his chief was mollified behind his moveless mask, and went to bed, and Horace, leaving Sir Austin in his study. Long hours the baronet sat alone. The house had not its usual influx of Feverels that day. Austin Wentworth was staying at Poer Hall, and had only come over for an hour. At midnight the house breathed sleep. Sir Austin put on his cloak and cap, and took the lamp to make his rounds. He apprehended nothing special, but with a mind never at rest he constituted himself the sentinel of Raynham. He passed the chamber where the Great-Aunt Grantley lay, who was to swell Richard's fortune, and so perform her chief business on earth. By her door he murmured: 'Good creature! you sleep with a sense of duty done,' and paced on, reflecting, 'She has not made money a demon of discord,' and blessed her. He had his thoughts at Hippias's somnolent door, and to them the world might have subscribed.

A monomaniac at large, watching over sane people in slumber! thinks Adrian Harley as he hears Sir Austin's footfall, and truly that was a strange object to see.—Where is the fortress that has not one weak gate? where the man who is sound at each particular angle? Ay, meditates the recumbent cynic, more or less mad is not every mother's son? Favourable circumstances — good air, good company, two or three good rules rigidly adhered to—keep the world out of bedlam. But, let the world fly into a passion, and is not bedlam the safest abode for it?

Sir Austin ascended the stairs, and bent his steps leisurely toward the chamber where his son was lying in the left wing of the abbey. At the end of the gallery which led to it he discovered a dim light. Doubting it an illusion, Sir Austin accelerated his pace. This wing had aforetime a bad character. Notwithstanding what years had done to polish it into fair repute, the Raynham kitchen stuck to tradition, and preserved certain stories

of ghosts seen there, that effectually blackened it in the susceptible minds of new housemaids and under-cooks, whose fears would not allow the sinner to wash his sins. Sir Austin had heard of the tales circulated by his domestics underground. He cherished his own belief, but discouraged theirs, and it was treason at Raynham to be caught traducing the left wing. As the baronet advanced, the fact of a light burning was clear to him. A slight descent brought him into the passage, and he beheld a poor human candle standing outside his son's chamber. At the same moment a door closed hastily. He entered Richard's room. The boy was absent. The bed was unpressed: no clothes about: nothing to show that he had been there that night. Sir Austin felt vaguely apprehensive. Has he gone to my room to await me? thought the father's heart. Something like a tear quivered in his arid eyes as he meditated and hoped this might be so. His own sleeping-room faced that of his son. He strode to it with a quick heart. It was empty. Alarm dislodged anger from his jealous heart, and dread of evil put a thousand questions to him that were answered in air. After pacing up and down his room he determined to go and ask the boy Thompson, as he called Ripton, what was known to him.

The chamber assigned to Master Ripton Thompson was at the northern extremity of the passage, and overlooked Lobourne and the valley to the west. The bed stood between the window and the door. Sir Austin found the door ajar, and the interior dark. To his surprise, the boy Thompson's couch, as revealed by the rays of his lamp, was likewise vacant. He was turning back when he fancied he heard the sibilation of a whispering in the room. Sir Austin cloaked the lamp and trod silently toward the window. The heads of his son Richard and the boy Thompson were seen crouched against the glass, holding excited converse together. Sir Austin listened, but he listened to a language of which he possessed not the key. Their talk was of fire, and of delay; of expected agrarian astonishment: of a farmer's huge wrath: of violence exercised upon gentlemen, and of vengeance: talk that the

the house it inhabits—must take its shape, sometimes intensify its narrowness—can spiritualize, but not expel the old lifelong lodgers above-stairs and below.

Sir Austin decided to continue quiescent.

The valley still lay black beneath the large autumnal stars, and the exclamations of the boys were becoming fevered and impatient. By and by one insisted that he had seen a twinkle. The direction he gave was out of their anticipations. Again the twinkle was announced. Both boys started to their feet. It was a twinkle in the right direction now.

'He 's done it!' cried Richard in great heat. 'Now you may say old Blaize 'll soon be old Blazes, Rip. I hope he 's asleep.'

'I 'm sure he 's snoring! Look there! He 's alight fast enough. He 's dry. He 'll burn. I say,' Ripton re-assumed the serious intonation, 'do you think they 'll ever suspect us?'

'What if they do? We must brunt it.'

'Of course we will. But, I say! I wish you hadn't given them the scent, though. I like to look innocent. I can't when I know people suspect me. Lord! look there! Isn't it just beginning to flare up!'

The farmer's grounds were indeed gradually standing out in sombre shadows.

'I 'll fetch my telescope,' said Richard. Ripton, somehow not liking to be left alone, caught hold of him.

'No; don't go and lose the best of it. Here, I 'll throw open the window, and we can see.'

The window was flung open, and the boys instantly stretched half their bodies out of it; Ripton appearing to devour the rising flames with his mouth; Richard with his eyes.

Opaque and statuesque stood the figure of the baronet behind them. The wind was low. Dense masses of smoke hung amid the darting snakes of fire, and a red malign light was on the neighbouring leafage. No figures could be seen. Apparently the flames had nothing to contend against, for they were making terrible strides into the darkness.

'Oh!' shouted Richard, overcome by excitement, 'if I had my telescope! We must have it! Let me go and fetch it! I will!'

The boys struggled together, and Sir Austin stepped back. As he did so, a cry was heard in the passage. He hurried out, closed the chamber, and came upon little Clare lying senseless along the floor.

CHAPTER V

ADRIAN PLIES HIS HOOK

In the morning that followed this night, great gossip was interchanged between Raynham and Lobourne. The village told how Farmer Blaize, of Belthorpe Farm, had his rick feloniously set fire to; his stables had caught fire, himself had been all but roasted alive in the attempt to rescue his cattle, of which numbers had perished in the flames. Raynham counterbalanced arson with an authentic ghost seen by Miss Clare in the left wing of the abbey —the ghost of a lady, dressed in deep mourning, a scar on her forehead, and a bloody handkerchief at her breast, frightful to behold! and no wonder the child was frightened out of her wits, and lay in a desperate state awaiting the arrival of the London doctors. It was added that the servants had all threatened to leave in a body, and that Sir Austin to appease them had promised to pull down the entire left wing, like a gentleman; for no decent creature, said Lobourne, could consent to live in a haunted house.

Rumour for the nonce had a stronger spice of truth than usual. Poor little Clare lay ill, and the calamity that had befallen Farmer Blaize, as regards his rick, was not much exaggerated. Sir Austin caused an account of it to be given him at breakfast, and appeared so scrupulously anxious to hear the exact extent of injury sustained by the farmer that Heavy Benson went down to inspect the scene. Mr. Benson returned, and, acting under Adrian's malicious advice, framed a formal report of the catastrophe, in which the farmer's breeches figured, and certain cooling applications to a part of the farmer's person. Sir Austin perused it without a smile. He took occasion to have it read out before the two boys, who listened very demurely, as to an ordinary newspaper incident; only when the report par-

ticularized the garments damaged, and the unwonted distressing position Farmer Blaize was reduced to in his bed, an indecorous fit of sneezing laid hold of Master Ripton Thompson, and Richard bit his lip and burst into loud laughter, Ripton joining him, lost to consequences.

'I trust you feel for this poor man,' said Sir Austin to his son, somewhat sternly. He saw no sign of feeling.

It was a difficult task for Sir Austin to keep his old countenance toward the Hope of Raynham, knowing him the accomplice-incendiary, and believing the deed to have been unprovoked and wanton. But he must do so, he knew, to let the boy have a fair trial against himself. Be it said, moreover, that the baronet's possession of his son's secret flattered him. It allowed him to act, and in a measure to feel, like Providence; enabled him to observe and provide for the movements of creatures in the dark. He therefore treated the boy as he commonly did, and Richard saw no change in his father to make him think he was suspected.

The youngsters' game was not so easy against Adrian. Adrian did not shoot or fish. Voluntarily he did nothing to work off the destructive nervous fluid, or whatever it may be, which is in man's nature; so that two culprit boys once in his power were not likely to taste the gentle hand of mercy, and Richard and Ripton paid for many a trout and partridge spared. At every minute of the day Ripton was thrown into sweats of suspicion that discovery was imminent, by some stray remark or message from Adrian. He was as a fish with the hook in his gills, mysteriously caught without having nibbled; and dive into what depths he would he was sensible of a summoning force that compelled him perpetually towards the gasping surface, which he seemed inevitably approaching when the dinner-bell sounded. There the talk was all of Farmer Blaize. If it dropped, Adrian revived it, and his caressing way with Ripton was just such as a keen sportsman feels toward the creature that has owned his skill, and is making its appearance for the world to acknowledge the same. Sir Austin saw the manoeuvres, and admired Adrian's shrewdness. But he had to check the young natural

lawyer, for the effect of so much masked examination upon Richard was growing baneful. This fish also felt the hook in his gills, but this fish was more of a pike, and lay in different waters, where there were old stumps and black roots to wind about, and defy alike strong pulling and delicate handling. In other words, Richard showed symptoms of a disposition to take refuge in lies.

'You know the grounds, my dear boy,' Adrian observed to him. 'Tell me; do you think it easy to get to the rick unperceived? I hear they suspect one of the farmer's turned-off hands.'

'I tell you I don't know the grounds,' Richard sullenly replied.

'Not?' Adrian counterfeited courteous astonishment. 'I thought Mr. Thompson said you were over there yesterday?'

Ripton, glad to speak a truth, hurriedly assured Adrian that it was not he had said so.

'Not? You had good sport, gentlemen, hadn't you?'

'Oh, yes!' mumbled the wretched victims, reddening as they remembered, in Adrian's slightly drawled rusticity of tone, Farmer Blaize's first address to them.

'I suppose you were among the Fire-worshippers last night, too?' persisted Adrian. 'In some countries, I hear, they manage their best sport at night-time, and beat up for game with torches. It must be a fine sight. After all, the country would be dull if we hadn't a rip here and there to treat us to a little conflagration.'

'A rip!' laughed Richard, to his friend's disgust and alarm at his daring. 'You don't mean this Rip, do you?'

'Mr. Thompson fire a rick? I should as soon suspect you, my dear boy. You are aware, young gentlemen, that it is rather a serious thing—eh? In this country, you know, the landlord has always been the pet of the laws. By the way,' Adrian continued, as if diverging to another topic, 'you met two gentlemen of the road in your explorations yesterday, Magians. Now, if I were a magistrate of the county, like Sir Miles Papworth, my suspicions would light upon those gentlemen. A tinker and a ploughman,

I think you said, Mr. Thompson. Not? Well, say two ploughmen.'

'More likely two tinkers,' said Richard.

'Oh! if you wish to exclude the ploughman—was he out of employ?'

Ripton, with Adrian's eyes inveterately fixed on him, stammered an affirmative.

'The tinker or the ploughman?'

'The ploughm——' Ingenuous Ripton looking about, as if to aid himself whenever he was able to speak the truth, beheld Richard's face blackening at him, and swallowed back half the word.

'The ploughman!' Adrian took him up cheerily. 'Then we have here a ploughman out of employ. Given a plough-man out of employ, and a rick burnt. The burning of a rick is an act of vengeance, and a ploughman out of employ is a vengeful animal. The rick and the ploughman are advancing to a juxtaposition. Motive being established, we have only to prove their proximity at a certain hour, and our ploughman voyages beyond seas.'

'Is it transportation for rick-burning?' inquired Ripton aghast.

Adrian spoke solemnly: 'They shave your head. You are manacled. Your diet is sour bread and cheese-parings. You work in strings of twenties and thirties. ARSON is branded on your backs in an enormous A. Theological works are the sole literary recreation of the well-conducted and deserving. Consider the fate of this poor fellow, and what an act of vengeance brings him to! Do you know his name?'

'How should I know his name?' said Richard, with an assumption of innocence painful to see.

Sir Austin remarked that no doubt it would soon be known, and Adrian perceived that he was to quiet his line, marvelling a little at the baronet's blindness to what was so clear. He would not tell, for that would ruin his future influence with Richard; still he wanted some present credit for his discernment and devotion. The boys got away from dinner, and, after deep consultation, agreed upon a course of conduct, which was to commiserate

Farmer Blaize loudly, and make themselves look as much like the public as it was possible for two young malefactors to look, one of whom already felt Adrian's enormous A devouring his back with the fierceness of the Promethean eagle, and isolating him for ever from mankind. Adrian relished their novel tactics sharply, and led them to lengths of lamentation for Farmer Blaize. Do what they might, the hook was in their gills. The farmer's whip had reduced them to bodily contortions: these were decorous compared with the spiritual writhings they had to perform under Adrian's manipulation. Ripton was fast becoming a coward, and Richard a liar, when next morning Austin Wentworth came over from Poer Hall bringing news that one Mr. Thomas Bakewell, yeoman, had been arrested on suspicion of the crime of arson and lodged in jail, awaiting the magisterial pleasure of Sir Miles Papworth. Austin's eye rested on Richard as he spoke these terrible tidings. The Hope of Raynham returned his look, perfectly calm, and had, moreover, the presence of mind not to look at Ripton.

CHAPTER VI

JUVENILE STRATAGEMS

As soon as they could escape, the boys got away together into an obscure corner of the park, and there took counsel of their extremity.

'Whatever shall we do now?' asked Ripton of his leader.

Scorpion girt with fire was never in a more terrible prison-house than poor Ripton, around whom the raging element he had assisted to create seemed to be drawing momently narrower circles.

'There 's only one chance,' said Richard, coming to a dead halt, and folding his arms resolutely.

His comrade inquired with the utmost eagerness what that chance might be.

Richard fixed his eyes on a flint, and replied: 'We must rescue that fellow from jail.'

Ripton gazed at his leader, and fell back with astonishment. 'My dear Ricky! but how are we to do it?'

Richard, still perusing his flint, replied: 'We must manage to get a file in to him and a rope. It can be done, I tell you. I don't care what I pay. I don't care what I do. He must be got out.'

'Bother that old Blaize!' exclaimed Ripton, taking off his cap to wipe his frenzied forehead, and brought down his friend's reproof.

'Never mind old Blaize now. Talk about letting it out! Look at you. I 'm ashamed of you. You talk about Robin Hood and King Richard! Why, you haven't an atom of courage. Why, you let it out every second of the day. Whenever Rady begins speaking you start; I can see the perspiration rolling down you. Are you afraid? And then you contradict yourself. You never keep to one story. Now, follow me. We must risk everything to

get him out. Mind that! And keep out of Adrian's way as much as you can. And keep to one story.'

With these sage directions the young leader marched his companion-culprit down to inspect the jail where Tom Bakewell lay groaning over the results of the super-mundane conflict, and the victim of it that he was.

In Lobourne Austin Wentworth had the reputation of the poor man's friend; a title he earned more largely ere he went to the reward God alone can give to that supreme virtue. Dame Bakewell, the mother of Tom, on hearing of her son's arrest, had run to comfort him and render him what help she could; but this was only sighs and tears, and, oh deary me! which only perplexed poor Tom, who bade her leave an unlucky chap to his fate, and not make himself a thundering villain. Whereat the dame begged him to take heart, and he should have a true comforter. 'And though it 's a gentleman that 's coming to you, Tom—for he never refuses a poor body,' said Mrs. Bakewell, 'it 's a true Christian, Tom! and the Lord knows if the sight of him mayn't be the saving of you, for he 's light to look on, and a sermon to listen to, he is!'

Tom was not prepossessed by the prospect of a sermon, and looked a sullen dog enough when Austin entered his cell. He was surprised at the end of half an hour to find himself engaged in man-to-man conversation with a gentleman and a Christian. When Austin rose to go, Tom begged permission to shake his hand.

'Take and tell young master up at the abbey that I ain't the chap to peach. He 'll know. He 's a young gentleman as 'll make any man do as he wants 'em! He 's a mortal wild young gentleman! And I 'm a ass! That 's where 'tis. But I ain't a blackguard. Tell him that, sir!'

This was how it came that Austin eyed young Richard seriously while he told the news at Raynham. The boy was shy of Austin more than of Adrian. Why, he did not know; but he made it a hard task for Austin to catch him alone, and turned sulky that instant. Austin was not clever like Adrian: he seldom divined other people's ideas, and always went the direct road to his object; so instead of beating about and setting the boy on the alert at all points,

crammed to the muzzle with lies, he just said, 'Tom Bake-well told me to let you know he does not intend to peach on you,' and left him.

Richard repeated the intelligence to Ripton, who cried aloud that Tom was a brick.

'He shan't suffer for it,' said Richard, and pondered on a thicker rope and sharper file.

'But will your cousin tell?' was Ripton's reflection.

'He!' Richard's lip expressed contempt. 'A ploughman refuses to peach, and you ask if one of our family will?'

Ripton stood for the twentieth time reproved on this point.

The boys had examined the outer walls of the jail, and arrived at the conclusion that Tom's escape might be managed if Tom had spirit, and the rope and file could be anyway reached to him. But to do this, somebody must gain admittance to his cell, and who was to be taken into their confidence?

'Try your cousin,' Ripton suggested, after much debate.

Richard, smiling, wished to know if he meant Adrian.

'No, no!' Ripton hurriedly reassured him. 'Austin.'

The same idea was knocking at Richard's head.

'Let 's get the rope and file first,' said he, and to Bursley they went for those implements to defeat the law, Ripton procuring the file at one shop and Richard the rope at another, with such masterly cunning did they lay their measures for the avoidance of every possible chance of detection. And better to assure this, in a wood outside Bursley, Richard stripped to his shirt and wound the rope round his body, tasting the tortures of anchorites and penitential friars, that nothing should be risked to make Tom's escape a certainty. Sir Austin saw the marks at night as his son lay asleep, through the half-opened folds of his bed-gown.

It was a severe stroke when, after all their stratagems and trouble, Austin Wentworth refused the office the boys had zealously designed for him. Time pressed. In a few days poor Tom would have to face the redoubtable Sir Miles, and get committed, for rumours of overwhelming evidence to convict him were rife about Lobourne, and

Farmer Blaize's wrath was unappeasable. Again and again young Richard begged his cousin not to see him disgraced, and to help him in this extremity. Austin smiled on him.

'My dear Ricky,' said he, 'there are two ways of getting out of a scrape: a long way and a short way. When you 've tried the roundabout method, and failed, come to me, and I 'll show you the straight route.'

Richard was too entirely bent upon the roundabout method to consider this advice more than empty words, and only ground his teeth at Austin's unkind refusal.

He imparted to Ripton, at the eleventh hour, that they must do it themselves, to which Ripton heavily assented.

On the day preceding poor Tom's doomed appearance before the magistrate, Dame Bakewell had an interview with Austin, who went to Raynham immediately, and sought Adrian's counsel upon what was to be done. Homeric laughter and nothing else could be got out of Adrian when he heard of the doings of these desperate boys: how they had entered Dame Bakewell's smallest of retail shops, and purchased tea, sugar, candles, and comfits of every description, till the shop was clear of customers: how they had then hurried her into her little back-parlour, where Richard had torn open his shirt and revealed the coils of rope, and Ripton displayed the point of a file from a serpentine recess in his jacket: how they had then told the astonished woman that the rope she saw and the file she saw were instruments for the liberation of her son; that there existed no other means on earth to save him, they, the boys, having unsuccessfully attempted all: how upon that Richard had tried with the utmost earnestness to persuade her to disrobe and wind the rope round her own person: and Ripton had aired his eloquence to induce her to secrete the file: how, when she resolutely objected to the rope, both boys began backing the file, and in an evil hour, she feared, said Dame Bakewell, she had rewarded the gracious permission given her by Sir Miles Papworth to visit her son by tempting Tom to file the law. Though, thanks be to the Lord! Dame Bakewell added, Tom had turned up

his nose at the file, and so she had told young Master Richard, who swore very bad for a young gentleman.

'Boys are like monkeys,' remarked Adrian, at the close of his explosions, 'the gravest actors of farcical nonsense that the world possesses. May I never be where there are no boys! A couple of boys left to themselves will furnish richer fun than any troop of trained comedians. No: no art arrives at the artlessness of nature in matters of comedy. You can't simulate the ape. Your antics are dull. They haven't the charming inconsequence of the natural animal. Look at these two! Think of the shifts they are put to all day long! They know I know all about it, and yet their serenity of innocence is all but unruffled in my presence. You 're sorry to think about the end of the business, Austin? So am I! I dread the idea of the curtain going down. Besides, it will do Ricky a world of good. A practical lesson is the best lesson.'

'Sinks deepest,' said Austin, 'but whether he learns good or evil from it is the question at stake.'

Adrian stretched his length at ease.

'This will be his first nibble at experience, old Time's fruit, hateful to the palate of youth! for which season only hath it any nourishment! Experience! You know Coleridge's capital simile? Mournful you call it? Well! all wisdom is mournful. 'Tis therefore, coz, that the wise do love the comic muse. Their own high food would kill them. You shall find great poets, rare philosophers, night after night on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? Because all 's dark at home. The stage is the pastime of great minds. That 's how it comes that the stage is now down. An age of rampant little minds, my dear Austin! How I hate that cant of yours about an Age of Work—you, and your Mortons, and your parsons Brawnley, rank radicals all of you, base materialists! What does Diaper Sandoe sing of your Age of Work? Listen!

'An Age of petty tit for tat,
An Age of busy gabble:
An Age that 's like a brewer's rat,
Fermenting for the rabble!

'An Age that 's chaste in Love, but lax
To virtuous abuses:
Whose gentlemen and ladies wax
Too dainty for their uses.

'An Age that drives an Iron Horse,
Of Time and Space defiant;
Exulting in a Giant's Force,
And trembling at the Giant.

'An Age of Quaker hue and cut,
By Mammon misbegotten;
See the mad Hamlet mouth and strut!
And mark the Kings of Cotton!

'From this unrest, lo, early wreck'd,
A Future staggers crazy,
Ophelia of the Ages, deck'd
With woeful weed and daisy!'

Murmuring, 'Get your Parson Brawnley to answer that!' Adrian changed the resting-place of a leg, and smiled.

The 'age' was an old battlefield between him and Austin.

'My Parson Brawnley, as you call him, has answered it,' said Austin, 'not by hoping his best, which would probably leave the Age to go mad to your satisfaction, but by doing it. And he has and will answer your Diaper Sandoe in better verse, as he confutes him in a better life.'

'You don't see Sandoe's depth,' Adrian replied. 'Consider that phrase, "Ophelia of the Ages"! Is not Brawnley, like a dozen other leading spirits—I think that 's your term—just the metaphysical Hamlet to drive her mad? She, poor maid! asks for marriage and smiling babes, while my lord lover stands questioning the Infinite, and rants to the Impalpable.'

Austin laughed. 'Marriage and smiling babes she would have in abundance, if Brawnley legislated. Wait till you know him. He will be over at Poer Hall shortly, and you will see what a Man of the Age means. But now, pray, consult with me about these boys.'

'Oh, those boys!' Adrian tossed a hand. 'Are there boys of the Age as well as men? Not? Then boys are better than men: boys are for all Ages. What do you think, Austin? They 've been studying Latude's *Escape*. I

found the book open in Ricky's room, on the top of *Jonathan Wild*. Jonathan preserved the secrets of his profession, and taught them nothing. So they're going to make a Latude of Mr. Tom Bakewell. He 's to be Bastille Bakewell, whether he will or no. Let them. Let the wild colt run free! We can't help them. We can only look on. We should spoil the play.'

Adrian always made a point of feeding the fretful beast Impatience with pleasantries—a not congenial diet; and Austin, the most patient of human beings, began to lose his self-control.

'You talked as if time belonged to you, Adrian. We have but a few hours left us. Work first, and joke afterwards. The boy's fate is being decided now.'

'So is everybody's, my dear Austin!' yawned the epicurean.

'Yes, but this boy is at present under our guardianship —under yours especially.'

'Not yet! not yet!' Adrian interjected languidly. 'No getting into scrapes when I have him. The leash, young hound! the collar, young colt! I 'm perfectly irresponsible at present.'

'You may have something different to deal with when you are responsible, if you think that.'

'I take my young prince as I find him, coz: a Julian or a Caracalla; a Constantine or a Nero. Then, if he will play the fiddle to a conflagration, he shall play it well: if he must be a disputatious apostate, at any rate he shall understand logic and men, and have the habit of saying his prayers.'

'Then you leave me to act alone?' said Austin, rising.

'Without a single curb!' Adrian gesticulated an acquiesced withdrawal. 'I 'm sure you would not, still more certain you cannot, do harm. And be mindful of my prophetic words: Whatever 's done, old Blaize will have to be bought off. There 's the affair settled at once. I suppose I must go to the chief to-night and settle it myself. We can't see this poor devil condemned, though it 's nonsense to talk of a boy being the prime instigator.'

Austin cast an eye at the complacent languor of the wise

youth, his cousin, and the little that he knew of his fellows told him he might talk for ever here, and not be comprehended. The wise youth's two ears were stuffed with his own wisdom. One evil only Adrian dreaded, it was clear—the action of the law.

As he was moving away, Adrian called out to him, 'Stop, Austin! There! don't be anxious! You invariably take the glum side. I 've done something. Never mind what. If you go down to Belthorpe, be civil, but not obsequious. You remember the tactics of Scipio Africanus against the Punic elephants? Well, don't say a word—in thine ear, coz: I 've turned Master Blaize's elephants. If they charge, 'twill be a feint, and back to the destruction of his serried ranks! You understand. Not? Well, 'tis as well. Only let none say that I sleep. If I must see him to-night, I go down knowing he has not got us in his power.' The wise youth yawned, and stretched out a hand for any book that might be within his reach. Austin left him to look about the grounds for Richard.

CHAPTER VII

DAPHNE'S BOWER

A LITTLE laurel-shaded temple of white marble looked out on the river from a knoll bordering the Raynham beechwoods, and was dubbed by Adrian Daphne's Bower. To this spot Richard had retired, and there Austin found him with his head buried in his hands, a picture of desperation, whose last shift has been defeated. He allowed Austin to greet him and sit by him without lifting his head. Perhaps his eyes were not presentable.

'Where 's your friend?' Austin began.

'Gone!' was the answer, sounding cavernous from behind hair and fingers. An explanation presently followed that a summons had come for him in the morning from Mr. Thompson; and that Mr. Ripton had departed against his will.

In fact, Ripton had protested that he would defy his parent and remain by his friend in the hour of adversity and at the post of danger. Sir Austin signified his opinion that a boy should obey his parent, by giving orders to Benson for Ripton's box to be packed and ready before noon; and Ripton's alacrity in taking the baronet's view of filial duty was as little feigned as his offer to Richard to throw filial duty to the winds. He rejoiced that the Fates had agreed to remove him from the very hot neighbourhood of Lobourne, while he grieved, like an honest lad, to see his comrade left to face calamity alone. The boys parted amicably, as they could hardly fail to do, when Ripton had sworn fealty to the Feverels with a warmth that made him declare himself bond, and due to appear at any stated hour and at any stated place to fight all the farmers in England, on a mandate from the heir of the house.

'So you 're left alone,' said Austin, contemplating the boy's shapely head. 'I 'm glad of it. We never know what 's in us till we stand by ourselves.'

There appeared to be no answer forthcoming. Vanity, however, replied at last: 'He wasn't much support.'

'Remember his good points now he 's gone, Ricky.'

'Oh! he was staunch,' the boy grumbled.

'And a staunch friend is not always to be found. Now have you tried your own way of rectifying this business, Ricky?'

'I have done everything.'

'And failed!'

There was a pause, and then the deep-toned evasion: 'Tom Bakewell 's a coward!'

'I suppose, poor fellow,' said Austin, in his kind way, 'he doesn't want to get into a deeper mess. I don't think he 's a coward.'

'He is a coward,' cried Richard. 'Do you think if I had a file I would stay in prison? I 'd be out the first night! And he might have had the rope, too—a rope thick enough for a couple of men his size and weight. Ripton and I and Ned Markham swung on it for an hour, and it didn't give way. He 's a coward, and deserves his fate. I 've no compassion for a coward.'

'Nor I much,' said Austin.

Richard had raised his head in the heat of his denunciation of poor Tom. He would have hidden it had he known the thought in Austin's clear eyes while he faced them.

'I never met a coward myself,' Austin continued. 'I have heard of one or two. One let an innocent man die for him.'

'How base!' exclaimed the boy.

'Yes, it was bad,' Austin acquiesced.

'Bad!' Richard scorned the poor contempt. 'How *I* would have spurned him! He was a coward!'

'I believe he pleaded the feelings of his family in his excuse, and tried every means to get the man off. I have read also in the confessions of a celebrated philosopher, that in his youth he committed some act of pilfering, and accused a young servant-girl of his own theft, who was condemned and dismissed for it, pardoning her guilty accuser.'

'What a coward!' shouted Richard. 'And he confessed it publicly?'

'You may read it yourself.'

'He actually wrote it down, and printed it?'

'You have the book in your father's library. Would you have done so much?'

Richard faltered. No! he admitted that he never could have told people.

'Then who is to call that man a coward?' said Austin. 'He expiated his cowardice as all who give way in moments of weakness, and are not cowards, must do. The coward chooses to think, "God does not see. I shall escape." He who is not a coward, and has succumbed, knows that God has seen all, and it is not so hard a task for him to make his heart bare to the world. Worse, I should fancy it, to know myself an impostor when men praised me.'

Young Richard's eyes were wandering on Austin's gravely cheerful face. A keen intentness suddenly fixed them, and he dropped his head.

'So I think you 're wrong, Ricky, in calling this poor Tom a coward because he refuses to try your means of escape,' Austin resumed. 'A coward hardly objects to drag in his accomplice. And, where the person involved belongs to a great family, it seems to me that for a poor plough-lad to volunteer not to do so speaks him anything but a coward.'

Richard was dumb. Altogether to surrender his rope and file was a fearful sacrifice, after all the time, trepidation, and study he had spent on those two saving instruments. If he avowed Tom's manly behaviour, Richard Feverel was in a totally new position. Whereas, by keeping Tom a coward, Richard Feverel was the injured one, and to seem injured is always a luxury; sometimes a necessity, whether among boys or men.

In Austin the Magian conflict would not have lasted long. He had but a blind notion of the fierceness with which it raged in young Richard. Happily for the boy, Austin was not a preacher. A single insistence, a cant phrase, a fatherly manner, might have wrecked him, by arousing ancient or latent opposition. The born

preacher we feel instinctively to be our foe. He may do some good to the wretches that have been struck down and lie gasping on the battle-field: he rouses antagonism in the strong. Richard's nature, left to itself, wanted little more than an indication of the proper track, and when he said, 'Tell me what I can do, Austin?' he had fought the best half of the battle. His voice was subdued. Austin put his hand on the boy's shoulder.

'You must go down to Farmer Blaize.'

'Well!' said Richard, sullenly divining the deed of penance.

'You 'll know what to say to him when you 're there.'

The boy bit his lip and frowned. 'Ask a favour of that big brute, Austin? I can't!'

'Just tell him the whole case, and that you don't intend to stand by and let the poor fellow suffer without a friend to help him out of his scrape.'

'But, Austin,' the boy pleaded, 'I shall have to ask him to help off Tom Bakewell! How can I ask him, when I hate him?'

Austin bade him go, and think nothing of the consequences till he got there.

Richard groaned in soul.

'You 've no pride, Austin.

'Perhaps not.'

'You don't know what it is to ask a favour of a brute you hate.'

Richard stuck to that view of the case, and stuck to it the faster the more imperatively the urgency of a movement dawned upon him.

'Why,' continued the boy, 'I shall hardly be able to keep my fists off him!'

'Surely you 've punished him enough, boy?' said Austin.

'He struck me!' Richard's lip quivered. 'He dared not come at me with his hands. He struck me with a whip. He 'll be telling everybody that he horsewhipped me, and that I went down and begged his pardon. Begged his pardon! A Feverel beg his pardon! Oh, if I had my will!'

'The man earns his bread, Ricky. You poached on his grounds. He turned you off, and you fired his rick.'

'And I 'll pay him for his loss. And I won't do any more.'

'Because you won't ask a favour of him?'

'No! I will not ask a favour of him.'

Austin looked at the boy steadily. 'You prefer to receive a favour from poor Tom Bakewell?'

At Austin's enunciation of this obverse view of the matter Richard raised his brow. Dimly a new light broke in upon him. 'Favour from Tom Bakewell, the ploughman? How do you mean, Austin?'

'To save yourself an unpleasantness you permit a country lad to sacrifice himself for you? I confess I should not have so much pride.'

'Pride!' shouted Richard, stung by the taunt, and set his sight hard at the blue ridges of the hills.

Not knowing for the moment what else to do, Austin drew a picture of Tom in prison, and repeated Tom's volunteer statement. The picture, though his intentions were far from designing it so, had to Richard, whose perception of humour was infinitely keener, a horrible chaw-bacon smack about it. Visions of a grinning lout, open from ear to ear, unkempt, coarse, splay-footed, rose before him and afflicted him with the strangest sensations of disgust and comicality, mixed up with pity and remorse—a sort of twisted pathos. There lay Tom; hobnail Tom! a bacon-munching, reckless, beer-swilling animal! and yet a man; a dear brave human heart notwithstanding; capable of devotion and unselfishness. The boy's better spirit was touched, and it kindled his imagination to realize the abject figure of poor clodpole Tom, and surround it with a halo of mournful light. His soul was alive. Feelings he had never known streamed in upon him as from an ethereal casement, an unwonted tenderness, an embracing humour, a consciousness of some ineffable glory, an irradiation of the features of humanity. All this was in the bosom of the boy, and through it all the vision of an actual hobnail Tom, coarse, unkempt, open from ear to ear; whose presence was a finger of shame to him and an oppression of clodpole; yet toward whom he felt just then a loving-kindness beyond what he felt for any living creature. He

laughed at him, and wept over him. He prized him, while he shrank from him. It was a genial strife of the angel in him with constituents less divine; but the angel was uppermost and led the van—extinguished loathing, humanized laughter, transfigured pride—pride that would persistently contemplate the corduroys of gaping Tom, and cry to Richard, in the very tone of Adrian's ironic voice: 'Behold your benefactor!'

Austin sat by the boy, unaware of the sublimer tumult he had stirred. Little of it was perceptible in Richard's countenance. The lines of his mouth were slightly drawn; his eyes hard set into the distance. He remained thus many minutes. Finally he jumped to his legs, saying, 'I 'll go at once to old Blaize and tell him.'

Austin grasped his hand, and together they issued out of Daphne's Bower, in the direction of Lobourne.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BITTER CUP

FARMER BLAIZE was not so astonished at the visit of Richard Feverel as that young gentleman expected him to be. The farmer, seated in his easy-chair in the little low-roofed parlour of an old-fashioned farm-house, with a long clay pipe on the table at his elbow, and a veteran pointer at his feet, had already given audience to three distinguished members of the Feverel blood, who had come separately, according to their accustomed secretiveness, and with one object. In the morning it was Sir Austin himself. Shortly after his departure, arrived Austin Wentworth; close on his heels, Algernon, known about Lobourne as the Captain, popular wherever he was known. Farmer Blaize reclined in considerable elation. He had brought these great people to a pretty low pitch. He had welcomed them hospitably, as a British yeoman should; but not budged a foot in his demands: not to the baronet: not to the captain: not to good young Mr. Wentworth. For Farmer Blaize was a solid Englishman; and, on hearing from the baronet a frank confession of the hold he had on the family, he determined to tighten his hold, and only relax it in exchange for tangible advantages—compensation to his pocket, his wounded person, and his still more wounded sentiments: the total indemnity being, in round figures, three hundred pounds, and a spoken apology from the prime offender, young Mister Richard. Even then there was a reservation. Provided, the farmer said, nobody had been tampering with any of his witnesses. In that case Farmer Blaize declared the money might go, and he would transport Tom Bakewell, as he had sworn he would. And it goes hard, too, with an accomplice, by law, added the farmer, knocking the ashes leisurely out of his pipe. He had no wish to bring any disgrace anywhere; he respected

the inmates of Raynham Abbey, as in duty bound; he should be sorry to see them in trouble. Only no tampering with his witnesses. He was a man for law. Rank was much: money was much: but law was more. In this country, law was above the sovereign. To tamper with the law was treason to the realm.

'I come to you direct,' the baronet explained. 'I tell you candidly in what way I discovered my son to be mixed up in this miserable affair. I promise you indemnity for your loss, and an apology that shall, I trust, satisfy your feelings, assuring you that to tamper with witnesses is not the province of a Feverel. All I ask of you in return is not to press the prosecution. At present it rests with you. I am bound to do all that lies in my power for this imprisoned man. How and wherefore my son was prompted to suggest, or assist in such an act, I cannot explain, for I do not know.'

'Hum!' said the farmer, 'I think I do.'

'You know the cause?' Sir Austin stared. 'I beg you to confide it to me.'

''Least, I can pretty nigh neighbour it with a guess,' said the farmer. 'We ain't good friends, Sir Austin, me and your son, just now—not to say cordial. I, ye see, Sir Austin, I 'm a man as don't like young gentlemen a-poachin' on his grounds without his permission—in special when birds is plentiful on their own. It appear he do like it. Consequently I has to flick this whip—as them fellers at the races: All in this 'ere ring 's mine! as much as to say; and who 's been hit, he 's had fair warnin'. I 'm sorry for 't, but that 's just the case.'

Sir Austin retired to communicate with his son, when he should find him.

Algernon's interview passed off in ale and promises. He also assured Farmer Blaize that no Feverel could be affected by his proviso.

No less did Austin Wentworth. The farmer was satisfied. 'Money 's safe, I know,' said he; 'now for the 'pology!' and Farmer Blaize thrust his legs further out, and his head further back.

The farmer naturally reflected that the three separate

visits had been conspired together. Still the baronet's frankness, and the baronet's not having reserved himself for the third and final charge, puzzled him. He was considering whether they were a deep, or a shallow lot, when young Richard was announced.

A pretty little girl with the roses of thirteen springs in her cheeks, and abundant beautiful bright tresses, tripped before the boy, and loitered shyly by the farmer's arm-chair to steal a look at the handsome new-comer. She was introduced to Richard as the farmer's niece, Lucy Desborough, the daughter of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, and, what was better, though the farmer did not pronounce it so loudly, a real good girl.

Neither the excellence of her character, nor her rank in life, tempted Richard to inspect the little lady. He made an awkward bow, and sat down.

The farmer's eyes twinkled. 'Her father,' he continued, 'fought and fell for his coontry. A man as fights for 's coontry 's a right to hould up his head—ay! with any in the land. Desb'roughs o' Dorset! D' ye know that family, Master Feverel?'

Richard did not know them, and, by his air, did not desire to become acquainted with any offshoot of that family.

'She can make puddens and pies,' the famer went on, regardless of his auditor's gloom. 'She 's a lady, as good as the best of 'em. I don't care about their being Catholics —the Des'broughs o' Dorset are gentlemen. And she 's good for the pianer, too! She strums to me of evenin's. I 'm for the old tunes: she 's for the new. Gal-like! While she 's with me she shall be taught things use'l. She can parley-voo a good 'un and foot it, as it goes; been in France a couple of year. I prefer the singin' of 't to the talkin' of 't. Come, Luce! toon up—eh? Ye wun't? That song about the Viffendeer—a female'—Farmer Blaize volunteered the translation of the title—'who wears the—you guess what! and marches along with the French sojers: a pretty brazen bit o' goods, I sh'd fancy.'

Mademoiselle Lucy corrected her uncle's French, but objected to do more. The handsome cross boy had almost

taken away her voice for speech, as it was, and sing in his company she could not; so she stood, a hand on her uncle's chair to stay herself from falling, while she wriggled a dozen various shapes of refusal, and shook her head at the farmer with fixed eyes.

'Aha!' laughed the farmer, dismissing her, 'they soon learn the difference 'twixt the young 'un and the old 'un. Go along, Luce! and learn yer lessons for to-morrow.'

Reluctantly the daughter of the Royal Navy glided away. Her uncle's head followed her to the door, where she dallied to catch a last impression of the young stranger's lowering face, and darted through.

Farmer Blaize laughed and chuckled. 'She ain't so fond of her uncle as that, every day! Not that she ain't a good nurse—the kindest little soul you 'd meet of a winter's walk! She 'll read t' ye, and make drinks, and sing, too, if ye likes it, and she won't be tired. A obstinate good 'un, she be! Bless her!'

The farmer may have designed, by these eulogies of his niece, to give his visitor time to recover his composure, and establish a common topic. His diversion only irritated and confused our shame-eaten youth. Richard's intention had been to come to the farmer's threshold: to summon the farmer thither, and in a loud and haughty tone then and there to take upon himself the whole burden of the charge against Tom Bakewell. He had strayed, during his passage to Belthorpe, somewhat back to his old nature; and his being compelled to enter the house of his enemy, sit in his chair, and endure an introduction to his family, was more than he bargained for. He commenced blinking hard in preparation for the horrible dose to which delay and the farmer's cordiality added inconceivable bitters. Farmer Blaize was quite at his ease; nowise in a hurry. He spoke of the weather and the harvest: of recent doings up at the abbey: glanced over that year's cricketing; hoped that no future Feverel would lose a leg to the game. Richard saw and heard arson in it all. He blinked harder as he neared the cup. In a moment of silence, he seized it with a gasp.

'Mr. Blaize! I have come to tell you that I am the person who set fire to your rick the other night.'

An odd contraction formed about the farmer's mouth. He changed his posture, and said: 'Ay? that 's what ye 're come to tell me, sir?'

'Yes!' said Richard firmly.

'And that be all?'

'Yes!' Richard reiterated.

The farmer again changed his posture. 'Then, my lad, ye 've come to tell me a lie!'

Farmer Blaize looked straight at the boy, undismayed by the dark flush of ire he had kindled.

'You dare to call me a liar!' cried Richard, starting up.

'I say,' the farmer renewed his first emphasis, and smacked his thigh thereto, 'that 's a lie!'

Richard held out his clenched fist. 'You have twice insulted me. You have struck me: you have dared to call me a liar. I would have apologized—I would have asked your pardon, to have got off that fellow in prison. Yes! I would have degraded myself that another man should not suffer for my deed——'

'Quite proper!' interposed the farmer.

'And you take this opportunity of insulting me afresh. You 're a coward, sir! nobody but a coward would have insulted me in his own house.'

'Sit ye down, sit ye down, young master,' said the farmer, indicating the chair and cooling the outburst with his hand. 'Sit ye down. Don't ye be hasty. If ye hadn't been hasty t'other day, we sh'd 'a' been friends yet. Sit ye down, sir. I sh'd be sorry to reckon you out a liar, Mr. Feverel, or anybody o' your name. I respects yer father, though we 're opp'site politics. I 'm willin' to think well o' you. What I say is, that as you say ain't the trewth. Mind! I don't like you none the worse for 't. But it ain't what is. That 's all! You knows it as well 's I!'

Richard, disdaining to show signs of being pacified, angrily reseated himself. The farmer spoke sense, and the boy, after his late interview with Austin, had become capable of perceiving vaguely that a towering passion is hardly the justification for a wrong course of conduct.

'Come,' continued the farmer, not unkindly, 'what else have you to say?'

Here was the same bitter cup he had already once drained brimming at Richard's lips again! Alas, poor human nature! that empties to the dregs a dozen of these evil drinks, to evade the single one which Destiny, less cruel, had insisted upon.

The boy blinked and tossed it off.

'I came to say that I regretted the revenge I had taken on you for your striking me.'

Farmer Blaize nodded.

'And now ye 've done, young gentleman?'

Still another cupful!

'I should be very much obliged,' Richard formally began: but his stomach was turned; he could but sip and sip, and gather a distaste which threatened to make the penitential act impossible. 'Very much obliged,' he repeated: 'much obliged, if you would be so kind,' and it struck him that had he spoken this at first he would have given it a wording more persuasive with the farmer and more worthy of his own pride: more honest, in fact: for a sense of the dishonesty of what he was saying caused him to cringe and simulate humility to deceive the farmer, and the more he said the less he felt his words, and, feeling them less, he inflated them more. 'So kind,' he stammered, 'so kind' (fancy a Feverel asking this big brute to be so kind!) 'as to do me the favour' (*me* the favour!) 'to exert yourself' (it 's all to please Austin) 'to endeavour to—hem! to'—— (there 's no saying it!)

The cup was full as ever. Richard dashed at it again.

'What I came to ask is, whether you would have the kindness to try what you could do' (what an infamous shame to have to beg like this!)—'do to save—do to ensure —whether you would have the kindness——' It seemed out of all human power to gulp it down. The draught grew more and more abhorrent. To proclaim one's iniquity, to apologize for one's wrongdoing; this much could be done; but to beg a favour of the offended party—that was beyond the self-abasement any Feverel could consent to. Pride, however, whose inevitable battle is against itself, drew aside the curtains of poor Tom's prison, crying a second time: 'Behold your benefactor!' and,

with the words burning in his ears, Richard swallowed the dose.

'Well, then, I want you, Mr. Blaize, if you don't mind—will you help me to get this man Bakewell off his punishment?'

To do Farmer Blaize justice, he waited very patiently for the boy, though he could not quite see why he did not take the gate at the first offer.

'Oh!' said he, when he heard and had pondered on the request: 'Hum! ha! we 'll see about it t'-morrow. But if he 's innocent, you know, we shan't mak' 'n guilty.'

'It was I did it!' Richard declared.

The farmer's half-amused expression sharpened a bit.

'So, young gentleman! and you 're sorry for the night's work?'

'I shall see that you are paid the full extent of your losses.'

'Thank 'ee,' said the farmer dryly.

'And if this poor man is released to-morrow, I don't care what the amount is.'

Farmer Blaize deflected his head twice in silence. 'Bribery,' one motion expressed. 'Corruption,' the other.

'Now,' said he, leaning forward, and fixing his elbows on his knees, while he counted the case at his finger's ends, 'excuse the liberty, but wishin' to know where this 'ere money 's to come from, I sh'd like jest t' ask if so be Sir Austin know o' this?'

'My father knows nothing of it,' replied Richard.

The farmer flung back in his chair. 'Lie number two,' said his shoulders, soured by the British aversion to being plotted at, and not dealt with openly.

'And ye 've the money ready, young gentleman?'

'I shall ask my father for it.'

'And he 'll hand 't out?'

'Certainly he will!'

Richard had not the slightest intention of ever letting his father into his counsels.

'A good three hundred pounds, ye know?' the farmer suggested.

No consideration of the extent of damages, and the size

of the sum, affected young Richard, who said boldly: 'He will not object when I tell him I want that sum.'

It was natural Farmer Blaize should be a trifle suspicious that a youth's guarantee would hardly be given for his father's readiness to disburse such a thumping bill, unless he had previously received his father's sanction and authority.

'Hum!' said he, 'why not 'a' told him before?'

The farmer threw an objectionable shrewdness into his query, that caused Richard to compress his mouth and glance high.

Farmer Blaize was positive 'twas a lie.

'Hum! Ye still hold to 't you fired the rick?' he asked.

'The blame is mine!' quoth Richard, with the loftiness of a patriot of old Rome.

'Na, na!' the straightforward Briton put him aside. 'Ye did 't, or ye didn't do 't. Did ye do 't, or no?'

Thrust in a corner, Richard said: 'I did it.'

Farmer Blaize reached his hand to the bell. It was answered in an instant by little Lucy, who received orders to fetch in a dependant at Belthorpe going by the name of the Bantam, and made her exit as she had entered, with her eyes on the young stranger.

'Now,' said the farmer, 'these be my principles. I 'm a plain man, Mr. Feverel. Above board with me, and you 'll find me handsome. Try to circumvent me, and I 'm a ugly customer. I 'll show you I 've no animosity. Your father pays—you apologize. That 's enough for me! Let Tom Bakewell fight 't out with the law, and I 'll look on. The law wasn't on the spot, I suppose? so the law ain't much witness. But I am. Leastwise the Bantam is. I tell you, young gentleman, the Bantam saw 't! It 's no mortal use whatever your denyin' that ev'dence. And where 's the good, sir, I ask? What comes of 't? Whether it be you, or whether it be Tom Bakewell —ain't all one? If I holds back, ain't it sim'lar? It 's the trewth I want! And here 't comes,' added the farmer, as Miss Lucy ushered in the Bantam, who presented a curious figure for that rare divinity to enliven.

CHAPTER IX

A FINE DISTINCTION

In build of body, gait, and stature, Giles Jinkson, the Bantam, was a tolerably fair representative of the Punic elephant, whose part, with diverse anticipations, the generals of the Blaize and Feverel forces, from opposing ranks, expected him to play. Giles, surnamed the Bantam, on account of some forgotten sally of his youth or infancy, moved and looked elephantine. It sufficed that Giles was well fed to assure that Giles was faithful—if uncorrupted. The farm which supplied to him ungrudging provender had all his vast capacity for work in willing exercise: the farmer who held the farm his instinct reverenced as the fountain-source of beef and bacon, to say nothing of beer, which was plentiful at Belthorpe, and good. This Farmer Blaize well knew, and he reckoned consequently that here was an animal always to be relied on—a sort of human composition out of dog, horse, and bull, a cut above each of these quadrupeds in usefulness, and costing proportionately more, but on the whole worth the money, and therefore invaluable, as everything worth its money must be to a wise man. When the stealing of grain had been made known at Belthorpe, the Bantam, a fellow-thresher with Tom Bakewell, had shared with him the shadow of the guilt. Farmer Blaize, if he hesitated which to suspect, did not debate a second as to which he would discard; and, when the Bantam said he had seen Tom secreting pilkins in a sack, Farmer Blaize chose to believe him, and off went poor Tom, told to rejoice in the clemency that spared his appearance at Sessions.

The Bantam's small sleepy orbits saw many things, and just at the right moment, it seemed. He was certainly the first to give the clue at Belthorpe on the night of the conflagration, and he may, therefore, have seen poor Tom

retreating stealthily from the scene, as he averred he did. Lobourne had its say on the subject. Rustic Lobourne hinted broadly at a young woman in the case, and, moreover, told a tale of how these fellow-threshers had, in noble rivalry, one day turned upon each other to see which of the two threshed the best; whereof the Bantam still bore marks, and malice, it was said. However, there he stood, and tugged his forelocks to the company, and if Truth really had concealed herself in him she must have been hard set to find her unlikeliest hiding-place.

'Now,' said the farmer, marshalling forth his elephant with the confidence of one who delivers his ace of trumps, 'tell this young gentleman what ye saw on the night of the fire, Bantam!'

The Bantam jerked a bit of a bow to his patron, and then swung round, fully obscuring him from Richard.

Richard fixed his eyes on the floor, while the Bantam in rudest Doric commenced his narrative. Knowing what was to come, and thoroughly nerved to confute the main incident, Richard barely listened to his barbarous locution: but when the recital arrived at the point where the Bantam affirmed he had seen 'T'm Baak'll wi's owen hoies,' Richard faced him, and was amazed to find himself being mutely addressed by a series of intensely significant grimaces, signs, and winks.

'What do you mean? Why are you making those faces at me?' cried the boy indignantly.

Farmer Blaize leaned round the Bantam to have a look at him, and beheld the stolidest mask ever given to man.

'Bain't makin' no faces at nobody,' growled the sulky elephant.

The farmer commanded him to face about and finish.

'A see T'm Baak'll,' the Bantam recommenced, and again the contortions of a horrible wink were directed at Richard. The boy might well believe this churl was lying, and he did, and was emboldened to exclaim:

'You never saw Tom Bakewell set fire to that rick!'

The Bantam swore to it, grimacing an accompaniment.

'I tell you,' said Richard, 'I put the lucifers there myself!'

The suborned elephant was staggered. He meant to telegraph to the young gentleman that he was loyal and true to certain gold pieces that had been given him, and that in the right place and at the right time he should prove so. Why was he thus suspected? Why was he not understood?

'A thowt I see 'un, then,' muttered the Bantam, trying a middle course.

This brought down on him the farmer, who roared, 'Thought! Ye thought! What d' ye mean? Speak out, and don't be thinkin'. Thought? What the devil 's that?'

'How could he see who it was on a pitch-dark night?' Richard put in.

'Thought!' the farmer bellowed louder. 'Thought—Devil take ye, when ye took yer oath on 't. Hallo! What are ye screwin' yer eye at Mr. Feverel for? I say, young gentleman, have you spoke to this chap before now?'

'I?' replied Richard. 'I have not seen him before.'

Farmer Blaize grasped the two arms of the chair he sat on and glared his doubts.

'Come,' said he to the Bantam, 'speak out, and ha' done wi' 't. Say what ye saw, and none o' yer thoughts. Damn yer thoughts! Ye saw Tom Bakewell fire that there rick!' The farmer pointed at some musk-pots in the window. 'What business ha' you to be a-thinkin'? You 're a witness? Thinkin' ain't ev'dence. What 'll ye say to-morrow before magistrate! Mind! what you says to-day, you 'll stick by to-morrow.'

Thus adjured, the Bantam hitched his breech. What on earth the young gentleman meant he was at a loss to speculate. He could not believe that the young gentleman wanted to be transported, but if he had been paid to help that, why, he would. And considering that this day's evidence rather bound him down to the morrow's, he determined, after much ploughing and harrowing through obstinate shocks of hair, to be not altogether positive as to the person. It is possible that he became thereby more a mansion of truth than he previously had been; for the night, as he said, was so dark that you could

not see your hand before your face; and though, as he expressed it, you might be mortal sure of a man, you could not identify him upon oath, and the party he had taken for Tom Bakewell, and could have sworn to, might have been the young gentleman present, especially as he was ready to swear it upon oath.

So ended the Bantam.

No sooner had he ceased, than Farmer Blaize jumped up from his chair, and made a fine effort to lift him out of the room from the point of his toe. He failed, and sank back groaning with the pain of the exertion and disappointment.

'They 're liars, every one!' he cried. 'Liars, perj'rers, bribers, and c'rrupters! Stop!' to the Bantam, who was slinking away. 'You 've done for yerself already! You swore to it!'

'A din't!' said the Bantam doggedly.

'You swore to 't!' the farmer vociferated afresh.

The Bantam played a tune upon the handle of the door, and still affirmed that he did not; a double contradiction at which the farmer absolutely raged in his chair, and was hoarse, as he called out a third time that the Bantam had sworn to it.

'Noa!' said the Bantam, ducking his poll. 'Noa!' he repeated in a lower note; and then, while a sombre grin betokening idiotic enjoyment of his profound casuistical quibble worked at his jaw:

'Not up'n o-ath!' he added, with a twitch of the shoulder and an angular jerk of the elbow.

Farmer Blaize looked vacantly at Richard, as if to ask him what he thought of England's peasantry after the sample they had there. Richard would have preferred not to laugh, but his dignity gave way to his sense of the ludicrous, and he let fly a shout. The farmer was in no laughing mood. He turned a wide eye back to the door. 'Lucky for 'm,' he exclaimed, seeing the Bantam had vanished, for his fingers itched to break that stubborn head. He grew very puffy, and addressed Richard solemnly:

'Now, look ye here, Mr. Feverel! You 've been a-

tampering with my witness. It 's no use denyin'! I say y' 'ave, sir! You, or some of ye. I don't care about no Feverel! My witness there has been bribed. The Bantam 's been bribed,' and he shivered his pipe with an energetic thump on the table—'bribed! I knows it! I could swear to 't!'

'Upon oath?' Richard inquired, with a grave face.

'Ay, upon oath!' said the farmer, not observing the impertinence.

'I 'd take my Bible oath on 't! He 's been corrupted, my principal witness! Oh! it 's dam' cunnin', but it won't do the trick. I 'll transpoort Tom Bakewell, sure as a gun. He shall travel, that man shall. Sorry for you, Mr. Feverel—sorry ye haven't seen how to treat me proper—you or yours. Money won't do everything—no! it won't. It 'll c'rrupt a witness, but it won't clear a felon. I 'd ha' 'scused you, sir! You 're a boy and 'll learn better. I asked no more than payment and a 'pology; and that I 'd ha' taken content—always provided my witnesses weren't tampered with. Now you must stand yer luck, all o' ye.'

Richard stood up and replied: 'Very well, Mr. Blaize.'

'And if,' continued the farmer, 'Tom Bakewell don't drag you into 't after 'm, why, you 're safe, as I hope ye 'll be, sincere!'

'It was not in consideration of my own safety that I sought this interview with you,' said Richard, head erect.

'Grant ye that,' the farmer responded. 'Grant ye that! Yer bold enough, young gentleman—comes of the blood that should be! If y' had only ha' spoke trewth! I believe yer father—believe every word he said. I do wish I could ha' said as much of Sir Austin's son and heir.'

'What!' cried Richard, with an astonishment hardly to be feigned, 'you have seen my father?'

But Farmer Blaize had now such a scent for lies that he could detect them where they did not exist, and mumbled gruffly:

'Ay, we knows all about that!'

The boy's perplexity saved him from being irritated. Who could have told his father? An old fear of his

father came upon him, and a touch of an old inclination to revolt.

'My father knows of this?' said he, very loudly, and staring, as he spoke, right through the farmer. 'Who has played me false? Who would betray me to him? It was Austin! No one knew it but Austin. Yes, and it was Austin who persuaded me to come here and submit to these indignities. Why couldn't he be open with me? I shall never trust him again——!'

'And why not you with me, young gentleman?' said the farmer. 'I sh'd trust you if ye had.'

Richard did not see the analogy. He bowed stiffly and bade him good afternoon.

Farmer Blaize pulled the bell. ''Company the young gentleman out, Lucy,' he waved to the little damsel in the doorway. 'Do the honours. And Mr. Richard, ye might ha' made a friend o' me, sir, and it 's not too late so to do. I 'm not cruel, but I hate lies. I whipped my boy Tom, bigger than you, for not bein' above board, only yesterday, ay! made 'un stand within swing o' this chair, and take 's measure. Now, if ye 'll come down to me, and speak trewth before the trial—if it 's only five minutes before 't; or if Sir Austin, who 's a gentleman, 'll say there 's been no tamperin' with any o' my witnesses, his word for 't—well and good! I 'll do my best to help off Tom Bakewell. And I 'm glad, young gentleman, you 've got a conscience about a poor man, though he 's a villain. Good afternoon, sir.'

Richard marched hastily out of the room, and through the garden, never so much as deigning a glance at his wistful little guide, who hung at the garden gate to watch him up the lane, wondering a world of fancies about the handsome proud boy.

CHAPTER X

RICHARD PASSES THROUGH HIS PRELIMINARY ORDEAL, AND IS THE OCCASION OF AN APHORISM

To have determined upon an act something akin to heroism in its way, and to have fulfilled it by lying heartily, and so subverting the whole structure built by good resolution, seems a sad downfall if we forget what human nature, in its green weedy spring, is composed of. Young Richard had quitted his Cousin Austin fully resolved to do his penance and drink the bitter cup; and he had drunk it; drained many cups to the dregs; and it was to no purpose. Still they floated before him, brimmed, trebly bitter. Away from Austin's influence, he was almost the same boy who had slipped the guinea into Tom Bakewell's hand, and the lucifers into Farmer Blaize's rick. For good seed is long ripening; a good boy is not made in a minute. Enough that the seed was in him. He chafed on his road to Raynham at the scene he had just endured, and the figure of Belthorpe's fat tenant burnt like hot copper on the tablet of his brain, insufferably condescending, and, what was worse, in the right. Richard, obscured as his mind's eye was by wounded pride, saw that clearly, and hated his enemy for it the more.

Heavy Benson's tongue was knelling dinner as Richard arrived at the abbey. He hurried up to his room to dress. Accident, or design, had laid the book of Sir Austin's aphorisms open on the dressing-table. Hastily combing his hair, Richard glanced down and read:

'The dog returneth to his vomit: the liar must eat his lie.'

Underneath was interjected in pencil: 'The devil's mouthful!'

Young Richard ran downstairs feeling that his father had struck him in the face.

Sir Austin marked the scarlet stain on his son's cheek-

bones. He sought the youth's eye, but Richard would not look, and sat conning his plate, an abject copy of Adrian's succulent air at that employment. How could he pretend to the relish of an epicure when he was painfully endeavouring to masticate 'the devil's mouthful'?

Heavy Benson sat upon the wretched dinner. Hippias, usually the silent member, as if awakened by the unnatural stillness, became sprightly, like the goatsucker owl at night, and spoke much of his book, his digestion, and his dreams, and was spared both by Algernon and Adrian. One inconsequent dream he related, about fancying himself quite young and rich, and finding himself suddenly in a field cropping razors around him, when, just as he had, by steps dainty as those of a French dancing-master, reached the middle, he to his dismay beheld a path clear of the bloodthirsty steel-crop, which he might have taken at first had he looked narrowly; and there he was.

Hippias's brethren regarded him with eyes that plainly said they wished he had remained there. Sir Austin, however, drew forth his note-book, and jotted down a reflection. A composer of aphorisms can pluck blossoms even from a razor-crop. Was not Hippias's dream the very counterpart of Richard's position? He, had he looked narrowly, might have taken the clear path: he, too, had been making dainty steps till he was surrounded by the grinning blades. And from that text Sir Austin preached to his son when they were alone. Little Clare was still too unwell to be permitted to attend the dessert, and father and son were soon closeted together.

It was a strange meeting. They seemed to have been separated so long. The father took his son's hand; they sat without a word passing between them. Silence said most. The boy did not understand his father: his father frequently thwarted him: at times he thought his father foolish: but that paternal pressure of his hand was eloquent to him of how warmly he was beloved. He tried once or twice to steal his hand away, conscious it was melting him. The spirit of his pride, and old rebellion, whispered him to be hard, unbending, resolute. Hard he had entered his father's study: hard he had met his father's eyes. He

could not meet them now. His father sat beside him gently; with a manner that was almost meekness, so he loved this boy. The poor gentleman's lips moved. He was praying internally to God for him.

By degrees an emotion awoke in the boy's bosom. Love is that blessed wand which wins the waters from the hardness of the heart. Richard fought against it, for the dignity of old rebellion. The tears would come; hot and struggling over the dams of pride. Shamefully fast they began to fall. He could no longer conceal them, or check the sobs. Sir Austin drew him nearer and nearer, till the beloved head was on his breast.

An hour afterwards, Adrian Harley, Austin Wentworth, and Algernon Feverel were summoned to the baronet's study.

Adrian came last. There was a style of affable omnipotence about the wise youth as he slung himself into a chair, and made an arch of the points of his fingers, through which to gaze on his blundering kinsmen. Careless as one may be whose sagacity has foreseen, and whose benevolent efforts have forestalled, the point of danger at the threshold, Adrian crossed his legs, and only intruded on their introductory remarks so far as to hum half audibly at intervals—

Ripton and Richard were two pretty men,

in parody of the old ballad. Young Richard's red eyes, and the baronet's ruffled demeanour, told him that an explanation had taken place, and a reconciliation. That was well. The baronet would now pay cheerfully. Adrian summed and considered these matters, and barely listened when the baronet called attention to what he had to say: which was elaborately to inform all present, what all present very well knew, that a rick had been fired, that his son was implicated as an accessory to the fact, that the perpetrator was now imprisoned, and that Richard's family were, as it seemed to him, bound in honour to do their utmost to effect the man's release.

Then the baronet stated that he had himself been down to Belthorpe, his son likewise: and that he had found every disposition in Blaize to meet his wishes.

The lamp which ultimately was sure to be lifted up to illumine the acts of this secretive race began slowly to dispread its rays; and, as statement followed statement, they saw that all had known of the business: that all had been down to Belthorpe: all save the wise youth Adrian, who, with due deference and a sarcastic shrug, objected to the proceeding, as putting them in the hands of the man Blaize. His wisdom shone forth in an oration so persuasive and aphoristic that had it not been based on a plea against honour, it would have made Sir Austin waver. But its basis was expediency, and the baronet had a better aphorism of his own to confute him with.

'Expediency is man's wisdom, Adrian Harley. Doing right is God's.'

Adrian curbed his desire to ask Sir Austin whether an attempt to counteract the just working of the law was doing right. The direct application of an aphorism was unpopular at Raynham.

'I am to understand, then,' said he, 'that Blaize consents not to press the prosecution.'

'Of course he won't,' Algernon remarked. 'Confound him, he 'll have his money, and what does he want besides?'

'These agricultural gentlemen are delicate customers to deal with. However, if he really consents——'

'I have his promise,' said the baronet, fondling his son.

Young Richard looked up to his father, as if he wished to speak. He said nothing, and Sir Austin took it as a mute reply to his caresses, and caressed him the more. Adrian perceived a reserve in the boy's manner, and as he was not quite satisfied that his chief should suppose him to have been the only idle, and not the most acute and vigilant member of the family, he commenced a cross-examination of him by asking who had last spoken with the tenant of Belthorpe?

'I think I saw him last,' murmured Richard, and relinquished his father's hand.

Adrian fastened on his prey. 'And left him with a distinct and satisfactory assurance of his amicable intentions?'

'No,' said Richard.

'Not?' the Feverels joined in astounded chorus.

Richard sidled away from his father, and repeated a shamefaced 'No.'

'Was he hostile?' inquired Adrian, smoothing his palms, and smiling.

'Yes,' the boy confessed.

Here was quite another view of their position. Adrian, generally patient of results, triumphed strongly at having evoked it, and turned upon Austin Wentworth, reproving him for inducing the boy to go down to Belthorpe. Austin looked grieved. He feared that Richard had failed in his good resolve.

'I thought it his duty to go,' he observed.

'It was!' said the baronet emphatically.

'And you see what comes of it, sir,' Adrian struck in. 'These agricultural gentlemen, I repeat, are delicate customers to deal with. For my part I would prefer being in the hands of a policeman. We are decidedly collared by Blaize. What were his words, Ricky? Give it in his own Doric.'

'He said he would transport Tom Bakewell.'

Adrian smoothed his palms, and smiled again. Then they could afford to defy Mr. Blaize, he informed them significantly, and made once more a mysterious allusion to the Punic elephant, bidding his relatives be at peace. They were attaching, in his opinion, too much importance to Richard's complicity. The man was a fool, and a very extraordinary arsonite, to have an accomplice at all. It was a thing unknown in the annals of rick-burning. But one would be severer than law itself to say that a boy of fourteen had instigated to crime a full-grown man. At that rate the boy was "father of the man" with a vengeance, and one might hear next that "the baby was father of the boy." They would find common sense a more benevolent ruler than poetical metaphysics.

When he had done, Austin, with his customary directness, asked him what he meant.

'I confess, Adrian,' said the baronet, hearing him expostulate with Austin's stupidity, 'I for one am at a loss. I have heard that this man, Bakewell, chooses voluntarily

not to inculpate my son. Seldom have I heard anything that so gratified me. It is a view of innate nobleness in the rustic's character which many gentlemen might take example from. We are bound to do our utmost for the man.' And, saying that he should pay a second visit to Belthorpe, to inquire into the reasons for the farmer's sudden exposition of vindictiveness, Sir Austin rose.

Before he left the room Algernon asked Richard if the farmer had vouchsafed any reasons, and the boy then spoke of the tampering with the witnesses, and the Bantam's 'Not upon oath!' which caused Adrian to choke with laughter. Even the baronet smiled at so cunning a distinction as that involved in swearing a thing, and not swearing it upon oath.

'How little,' he exclaimed, 'does one yeoman know another! To elevate a distinction into a difference is the natural action of their minds. I will point that out to Blaize. He shall see that the idea is native born.'

Richard saw his father go forth. Adrian, too, was ill at ease.

'This trotting down to Belthorpe spoils all,' said he. 'The affair would pass over to-morrow—Blaize has no witnesses. The old rascal is only standing out for more money.'

'No, he isn't,' Richard corrected him. 'It 's not that. I 'm sure he believes his witnesses have been tampered with, as he calls it.'

'What if they have, boy?' Adrian put it boldly. 'The ground is cut from under his feet.'

'Blaize told me that if my father would give his word there had been nothing of the sort, he would take it. My father will give his word.'

'Then,' said Adrian, 'you had better stop him from going down.'

Austin looked at Adrian keenly, and questioned him whether he thought the farmer was justified in his suspicions. The wise youth was not to be entrapped. He had only been given to understand that the witnesses were tolerably unstable, and, like the Bantam, ready to swear lustily, but not upon the Book. How given to under-

stand, he chose not to explain, but he reiterated that the chief should not be allowed to go down to Belthorpe.

Sir Austin was in the lane leading to the farm when he heard steps of someone running behind him. It was dark, and he shook off the hand that laid hold of his cloak, roughly, not recognizing his son.

'It 's I, sir,' said Richard panting. 'Pardon me. You mustn't go in there.'

'Why not?' said the baronet, putting his arm about him.

'Not now,' continued the boy. 'I will tell you all to-night. I must see the farmer myself. It was my fault sir. I—I lied to him—the liar must eat his lie. Oh, forgive me for disgracing you, sir. I did it—I hope I did it to save Tom Bakewell. Let me go in alone, and speak the truth.'

'Go, and I will wait for you here,' said his father.

The wind that bowed the old elms, and shivered the dead leaves in the air, had a voice and a meaning for the baronet during that half-hour's lonely pacing up and down under the darkness, awaiting his boy's return. The solemn gladness of his heart gave nature a tongue. Through the desolation flying overhead—the wailing of the Mother of Plenty across the bare-swept land—he caught intelligible signs of the beneficent order of the universe, from a heart newly confirmed in its grasp of the principle of human goodness, as manifested in the dear child who had just left him; confirmed in its belief in the ultimate victory of good within us, without which nature has neither music nor meaning, and is rock, stone, tree, and nothing more.

In the dark, the dead leaves beating on his face, he had a word for his note-book: 'There is for the mind but one grasp of happiness: from that uppermost pinnacle of wisdom, whence we see that this world is well designed.'

CHAPTER XI

IN WHICH THE LAST ACT OF THE BAKEWELL COMEDY IS CLOSED IN A LETTER

Of all the chief actors in the Bakewell comedy, Master Ripton Thompson awaited the fearful morning which was to decide Tom's fate, in dolefullest mood, and suffered the gravest mental terrors. Adrian, on parting with him, had taken casual occasion to speak of the position of the criminal in modern Europe, assuring him that international treaty now did what universal empire had aforetime done, and that among Atlantic barbarians now, as among the Scythians of old, an offender would find precarious refuge and an emissary haunting him.

In the paternal home, under the roofs of law, and removed from the influence of his conscienceless young chief, the staggering nature of the act he had put his hand to, its awful felonious aspect, overwhelmed Ripton. He saw it now for the first time. 'Why, it 's next to murder!' he cried out to his amazed soul, and wandered about the house with a prickly skin. Thoughts of America, and commencing life afresh as an innocent gentleman, had crossed his disordered brain. He wrote to his friend Richard, proposing to collect disposable funds, and embark, in case of Tom's breaking his word, or of accidental discovery. He dared not confide the secret to his family, as his leader had sternly enjoined him to avoid any weakness of that kind; and, being by nature honest and communicative, the restriction was painful, and melancholy fell upon the boy. Mamma Thompson attributed it to love. The daughters of parchment rallied him concerning Miss Clare Forey. His hourly letters to Raynham, and silence as to everything and everybody there, his nervousness, and unwonted propensity to sudden inflammation of the cheeks, were set down for sure signs of the passion. Miss Letitia Thompson, the pretty and least parchmenty

one, destined by her papa for the heir of Raynham, and perfectly aware of her brilliant future, up to which she had, since Ripton's departure, dressed and grimaced, and studied cadences (the latter with such success, though not yet fifteen, that she languished to her maid, and melted the small factotum footman)—Miss Letty, whose insatiable thirst for intimations about the young heir Ripton could not satisfy, tormented him daily in revenge, and once, quite unconsciously, gave the lad a fearful turn; for after dinner, when Mr. Thompson read the paper by the fire, preparatory to sleeping at his accustomed post, and Mamma Thompson and her submissive female brood sat tasking the swift intricacies of the needle, and emulating them with the tongue, Miss Letty stole behind Ripton's chair, and introduced between him and his book the Latin initial letter, large and illuminated, of the theme she supposed to be absorbing him, as it did herself. The unexpected vision of this accusing captain of the alphabet, this resplendent and haunting A, fronting him bodily, threw Ripton straight back in his chair, where Guilt, with her ancient indecision what colours to assume on detection, flew from red to white, from white to red, across his fallen chaps. Letty laughed triumphantly. Amor, the word she had in mind, certainly has a connection with arson.

But the delivery of a letter into Master Ripton's hands furnished her with other and likelier appearances to study. For scarce had Ripton plunged his head into the missive than he gave way to violent transports, such as the healthy-minded little damsel, for all her languishing cadences, deemed she really could express were a downright declaration to be made to her. The boy did not stop at table. Quickly recollecting the presence of his family, he rushed to his own room. And now the girl's ingenuity was taxed to gain possession of that letter. She succeeded, of course, she being a huntress with few scruples and the game unguarded. With eyes of amazement she read this foreign matter:

DEAR RIPTON,

If Tom had been committed I would have shot old Blaize. Do you know my father was behind us that night when Clare saw the

ghost and heard all we said before the fire burst out. It is no use trying to conceal anything from him. Well as you are in an awful state I will tell you all about it. After you left Ripton I had a conversation with Austin and he persuaded me to go down to old Blaize and ask him to help off Tom. I went for I would have done anything for Tom after what he said to Austin and I defied the old churl to do his worst. Then he said if my father paid the money and nobody had tampered with his witnesses he would not mind if Tom did get off and he had his chief witness in called the Bantam very like his master I think and the Bantam began winking at me tremendjously as you say, and said he had sworn he saw Tom Bakewell but not upon oath. He meant not on the Bible. He could swear to it but not on the Bible. I burst out laughing and you should have seen the rage old Blaize was in. It was splendid fun. Then we had a consultation at home Austin Rady my father Uncle Algernon who has come down to us again and your friend in prosperity and adversity R. D. F. My father said he would go down to old Blaize and give him the word of a gentleman we had not tampered with his witnesses and when he was gone we were all talking and Rady says he must not see the farmer. I am as certain as I live that it was Rady bribed the Bantam. Well I ran and caught up my father and told him not to go in to old Blaize but I would and eat my words and tell him the truth. He waited for me in the lane. Never mind what passed between me and old Blaize. He made me beg and pray of him not to press it against Tom and then to complete it he brought in a little girl a niece of his and says to me she 's your best friend after all and told me to thank her. A little girl twelve years of age. What business had she to mix herself up in my matters. Depend upon it Ripton wherever there is mischief there are girls I think. She had the insolence to notice my face, and ask me not to be unhappy. I was polite of course but I would not look at her. Well the morning came and Tom was had up before Sir Miles Papworth. It was Sir Miles gout gave us the time or Tom would have been had up before we could do anything. Adrian did not want me to go but my father said I should accompany him and held my hand all the time. I shall be careful about getting into these scrapes again. When you have done anything honourable you do not mind but getting among policemen and magistrates makes you ashamed of yourself. Sir Miles was very attentive to my father and me and dead against Tom. We sat beside him and Tom was brought in. Sir Miles told my father that if there was one thing that showed a low villain it was rick-burning. What do you think of that. I looked him straight in the face and he said to me he was doing me a service in getting Tom committed and clearing the country of such fellows and Rady began laughing. I hate Rady. My father said his son was not in haste to inherit and have estates of his own to watch and Sir Miles laughed too.

I thought we were discovered at first. Then they began the examination of Tom. The Tinker was the first witness and he proved that Tom had spoken against old Blaize and said something about burning his rick. I wished I had stood in the lane to Bursley with him alone. Our country lawyer we engaged for Tom cross-questioned him and then he said he was not ready to swear to the exact words that had passed between him and Tom. I should think not. Then came another who swore he had seen Tom lurking about the farmer's grounds that night. Then came the Bantam and I saw him look at Rady. I was tremendjously excited and my father kept pressing my hand. Just fancy my being brought to feel that a word from that fellow would make me miserable for life and he must perjure himself to help me. That comes of giving way to passion. My father says when we do that we are calling in the devil as doctor. Well the Bantam was told to state what he had seen and the moment he began Rady who was close by me began to shake and he was laughing I knew though his face was as grave as Sir Miles. You never heard such a rigmarole but I could not laugh. He said he thought he was certain he had seen somebody by the rick and it was Tom Bakewell who was the only man he knew who had a grudge against Farmer Blaize and if the object had been a little bigger he would not mind swearing to Tom and would swear to him for he was dead certain it was Tom only what he saw looked smaller and it was pitch-dark at the time. He was asked what time it was he saw the person steal away from the rick and then he began to scratch his head and said supper-time. Then they asked what time he had supper and he said nine o'clock by the clock and we proved that at nine o'clock Tom was drinking in the ale-house with the Tinker at Bursley and Sir Miles swore and said he was afraid he could not commit Tom and when he heard that Tom looked up at me and I say he is a noble fellow and no one shall sneer at Tom while I live. Mind that. Well Sir Miles asked us to dine with him and Tom was safe and I am to have him and educate him if I like for my servant and I will. And I will give money to his mother and make her rich and he shall never repent he knew me. I say Rip. The Bantam must have seen *me*. It was when I went to stick in the lucifers. As we were all going home from Sir Miles's at night he has lots of red-faced daughters but I did not dance with them though they had music and were full of fun and I did not care to I was so delighted and almost let it out. When we left and rode home Rady said to my father the Bantam was not such a fool as he was thought and my father said one must be in a state of great personal exaltation to apply that epithet to any man and Rady shut his mouth and I gave my pony a clap of the heel for joy. I think my father suspects what Rady did and does not approve of it. And he need not have done it after all and might have spoilt it. I have been obliged to order him not to call me Ricky for he

stops short at Rick so that everybody knows what he means. My dear Austin is going to South America. My pony is in capital condition. My father is the cleverest and best man in the world. Clare is a little better. I am quite happy. I hope we shall meet soon my dear old Rip and we will not get into any more tremendous scrapes will we.—I remain,

Your sworn friend,

RICHARD DORIA FEVEREL.

P.S. I am to have a nice River Yacht. Good-bye, Rip. Mind you learn to box. Mind you are not to show this to any of your friends on pain of my displeasure.

N.B. Lady B. was so angry when I told her that I had not come to her before. She would do anything in the world for me. I like her next best to my father and Austin. Good-bye old Rip.

Poor little Letitia, after three perusals of this ingenuous epistle, where the laws of punctuation were so disregarded, resigned it to one of the pockets of her brother Ripton's best jacket, deeply smitten with the careless composer. And so ended the last act of the Bakewell comedy, on which the curtain closes with Sir Austin's pointing out to his friends the beneficial action of the system in it from beginning to end.

CHAPTER XII

THE BLOSSOMING SEASON

LAYING of ghosts is a public duty, and as the mystery of the apparition that had frightened little Clare was never solved on the stage of events at Raynham, where dread walked the abbey, let us go behind the scenes a moment. Morally superstitious as the baronet was, the character of his mind was opposed to anything like spiritual agency in the affairs of men, and, when the matter was made clear to him, it shook off a weight of weakness and restored his mental balance; so that from this time he went about more like the man he had once been, grasping more thoroughly the great truth, that this world is well designed. Nay, he could laugh on hearing Adrian, in reminiscence of the ill luck of one of the family members at its first manifestation, call the uneasy spirit, Algernon's leg.

Mrs. Doria was outraged. She maintained that her child had seen—— Not to believe in it was almost to rob her of her personal property. After satisfactorily studying his old state of mind in her, Sir Austin, moved by pity, took her aside one day and showed her that her ghost could write words in the flesh. It was a letter from the unhappy lady who had given Richard birth, brief cold lines, simply telling him his house would be disturbed by her no more. Cold lines, but penned by what heart-broken abnegation, and underlying them what anguish of soul! Like most who dealt with him, Lady Feverel thought her husband a man fatally stern and implacable, and she acted as silly creatures will act when they fancy they see a fate against them: she neither petitioned for her right nor claimed it: she tried to ease her heart's yearning by stealth, and now she renounced all. Mrs. Doria, not wanting in the family tenderness and softness, shuddered at him for accepting the sacrifice so composedly: but he

bade her to think how distracting to this boy would be the sight of such relations between mother and father. A few years, and as man he should know, and judge, and love her. 'Let this be her penance, not inflicted by me!' Mrs. Doria bowed to the System for another, not opining when it would be her turn to bow for herself.

Further behind the scenes we observe Rizzio and Mary grown older, much disenchanted: she discrowned, dishevelled, he with gouty fingers on a greasy guitar. The Diaper Sandoe of promise lends his pen for small hires. His fame has sunk; his bodily girth has sensibly increased. What he can do, and will do, is still his theme; meantime the juice of the juniper is in requisition, and it seems that those small hires cannot be performed without it. Returning from her wretched journey to her wretcheder home, the lady had to listen to a mild reproof from easy-going Diaper, a reproof so mild that he couched it in blank verse: for, seldom writing metrically now, he took to talking it. With a fluent sympathetic tear, he explained to her that she was damaging her interests by these proceedings; nor did he shrink from undertaking to elucidate wherefore. Pluming a smile upon his succulent mouth, he told her that the poverty she lived in was utterly unbefitting her gentle nurture, and that he had reason to believe—could assure her—that an annuity was on the point of being granted her by her husband. And Diaper broke his bud of a smile into full flower as he delivered this information. She learnt that he had applied to her husband for money. It is hard to have one's last prop of self-respect cut away just when we are suffering a martyr's agony at the stake. There was a five minutes' tragic colloquy in the recesses behind the scenes—totally tragic to Diaper, who had fondly hoped to bask in the warm sun of that annuity, and re-emerge from his state of grub. The lady then wrote the letter Sir Austin held open to his sister. The atmosphere behind the scenes is not wholesome, so, having laid the ghost, we will return and face the curtain.

That infinitesimal dose of THE WORLD which Master Ripton Thompson had furnished to the System with such

instantaneous and surprising effect was considered by Sir Austin to have worked well, and to be for the time quite sufficient, so that Ripton did not receive a second invitation to Raynham, and Richard had no special intimate of his own age to rub his excessive vitality against, and wanted none. His hands were full enough with Tom Bakewell. Moreover, his father and he were heart in heart. The boy's mind was opening, and turned to his father affectionately reverent. At this period, when the young savage grows into higher influences, the faculty of worship is foremost in him. At this period Jesuits will stamp the future of their chargeling flocks; and all who bring up youth by a System, and watch it, know that it is the malleable moment. Boys possessing any mental or moral force to give them a tendency, then predestinate their careers; or, if under supervision, take the impress that is given them: not often to cast it off, and seldom to cast it off altogether.

In Sir Austin's note-book was written: 'Between simple boyhood and adolescence—the blossoming season—on the threshold of puberty, there is one unselfish hour—say, spiritual seed-time.'

He took care that good seed should be planted in Richard, and that the most fruitful seed for a youth, namely, example, should be of a kind to germinate in him the love of every form of nobleness.

'I am only striving to make my son a Christian,' he said, answering them who persisted in expostulating with the System. And to these instructions he gave an aim: 'First be virtuous,' he told his son, 'and then serve your country with heart and soul.' The youth was instructed to cherish an ambition for statesmanship, and he and his father read history and the speeches of British orators to some purpose; for one day Sir Austin found him leaning cross-legged, and with his hand to his chin, against a pedestal supporting the bust of Chatham, contemplating the hero of our Parliament, his eyes streaming with tears.

People said the baronet carried the principle of example so far that he only retained his boozing dyspeptic brother Hippias at Raynham in order to exhibit to his son the

woeful retribution nature wreaked upon a life of indulgence; poor Hippias having now become a walking complaint. This was unjust, but there is no doubt he made use of every illustration to disgust or encourage his son that his neighbourhood afforded him, and did not spare his brother, for whom Richard entertained a contempt in proportion to his admiration of his father, and was for flying into penitential extremes which Sir Austin had to soften.

The boy prayed with his father morning and night.

'How is it, sir,' he said one night, 'I can't get Tom Bakewell to pray?'

'Does he refuse?' Sir Austin asked.

'He seems to be ashamed to,' Richard replied. 'He wants to know what is the good, and I don't know what to tell him.'

'I 'm afraid it has gone too far with him,' said Sir Austin, 'and until he has had some deep sorrows he will not find the divine want of prayer. Strive, my son, when you represent the people, to provide for their education. He feels everything now through a dull impenetrable rind. Culture is half-way to heaven. Tell him, my son, should he ever be brought to ask how he may know the efficacy of prayer, and that his prayer will be answered, tell him' (he quoted *The Pilgrim's Scrip*):

'"Who rises from prayer a better man, his prayer is answered."'

'I will, sir,' said Richard, and went to sleep happy.

Happy in his father and in himself, the youth now lived. Conscience was beginning to inhabit him, and he carried some of the freightage known to men; though in so crude a form that it overweighed him, now on this side, now on that.

The wise youth Adrian observed these further progressionary developments in his pupil, soberly cynical. He was under Sir Austin's interdict not to banter him, and eased his acrid humours inspired by the sight of a felonious young rick-burner turning saint, by grave affectations of sympathy and extreme accuracy in marking the not widely-distant dates of his various changes. The bread-and-water phase lasted a fortnight: the vegetarian (an imitation of

his cousin Austin), little better than a month; the religious, somewhat longer; the religious-propagandist (when he was for converting the heathen of Lobourne and Bursley, and the domestics of the abbey, including Tom Bakewell), longer still, and hard to bear; he tried to convert Adrian! All the while Tom was being exercised like a raw recruit. Richard had a drill-sergeant from the nearest barracks down for him, to give him a proper pride in himself, and marched him to and fro with immense satisfaction, and nearly broke his heart trying to get the round-shouldered rustic to take in the rudiments of letters: for the boy had unbounded hopes for Tom, as a hero in grain.

Richard's pride also was cast aside. He affected to be, and really thought he was, humble. Whereupon Adrian, as by accident, imparted to him the fact that men were animals, and he an animal with the rest of them.

'*I* an animal!' cries Richard in scorn, and for weeks he was as troubled by this rudiment of self-knowledge as Tom by his letters. Sir Austin had him instructed in the wonders of anatomy, to restore his self-respect.

Seed-time passed thus smoothly, and adolescence came on, and his cousin Clare felt what it was to be of an opposite sex to him. She too was growing, but nobody cared how she grew. Outwardly even her mother seemed absorbed in the sprouting of the green off-shoot of the Feverel tree, and Clare was his handmaiden, little marked by him.

Lady Blandish honestly loved the boy. She would tell him: 'If I had been a girl, I would have had you for my husband.' And he with the frankness of his years would reply: 'And how do you know I would have had you?' causing her to laugh and call him a silly boy, for had he not heard her say she would have had him? Terrible words he knew not then the meaning of!

'You don't read your father's book,' she said. Her own copy was bound in purple velvet, gilt-edged, as decorative ladies like to have holier books, and she carried it about with her, and quoted it, and (Adrian remarked to Mrs. Doria) hunted a noble quarry, and deliberately aimed at him therewith, which Mrs. Doria chose to believe, and regretted her brother would not be on his guard.

'See here,' said Lady Blandish, pressing an almondy finger-nail to one of the aphorisms, which instanced how age and adversity must clay-enclose us ere we can effectually resist the magnetism of any human creature in our path. 'Can you understand it, child?'

Richard informed her that when she read he could.

'Well, then, my squire,' she touched his cheek and ran her fingers through his hair, 'learn as quick as you can not to be all hither and yon with a hundred different attractions, as I was before I met a wise man to guide me.'

'Is my father very wise?' Richard asked.

'I think so,' the lady emphasized her individual judgment.

'Do you——' Richard broke forth, and was stopped by a beating of his heart.

'Do I—what?' she calmly queried.

'I was going to say, do you—I mean, I love him so much.'

Lady Blandish smiled and slightly coloured.

They frequently approached this theme, and always retreated from it; always with the same beating of heart to Richard, accompanied by the sense of a growing mystery, which, however, did not as yet generally disturb him.

Life was made very pleasant to him at Raynham, as it was part of Sir Austin's principle of education that his boy should be thoroughly joyous and happy; and whenever Adrian sent in a satisfactory report of his pupil's advancement, which he did pretty liberally, diversions were planned, just as prizes are given to diligent schoolboys, and Richard was supposed to have all his desires gratified while he attended to his studies. The System flourished. Tall, strong, bloomingly healthy, he took the lead of his companions on land and water, and had more than one bondsman in his service besides Ripton Thompson—the boy without a destiny! Perhaps the boy with a destiny was growing up a trifle too conscious of it. His generosity to his occasional companions was princely, but was exercised something too much in the manner of a prince; and, notwithstanding his contempt for baseness, he would overlook that more easily than an offence to his pride, which demanded an utter servility when it had once been rendered

susceptible. If Richard had his followers he had also his feuds. The Papworths were as subservient as Ripton, but young Ralph Morton, the nephew of Mr. Morton, and a match for Richard in numerous promising qualities, comprising the noble science of fisticuffs, this youth spoke his mind too openly, and moreover would not be snubbed. There was no middle course for Richard's comrades between high friendship or absolute slavery. He was deficient in those cosmopolite habits and feelings which enable boys and men to hold together without caring much for each other; and, like every insulated mortal, he attributed the deficiency, of which he was quite aware, to the fact of his possessing a superior nature. Young Ralph was a lively talker: therefore, argued Richard's vanity, he had no intellect. He was affable; therefore he was frivolous. The women liked him: therefore he was a butterfly. In fine, young Ralph was popular, and our superb prince, denied the privilege of despising, ended by detesting him.

Early in the days of their contention for leadership, Richard saw the absurdity of affecting to scorn his rival. Ralph was an Eton boy, and hence, being robust, a swimmer and a cricketer. A swimmer and a cricketer is nowhere to be scorned in youth's republic. Finding that manoeuvre would not do, Richard was prompted once or twice to entrench himself behind his greater wealth and his position; but he soon abandoned that also, partly because his chilliness to ridicule told him he was exposing himself, and chiefly that his heart was too chivalrous. And so he was dragged into the lists by Ralph, and experienced the luck of champions. For cricket, and for diving, Ralph bore away the belt: Richard's middle stump tottered before his ball, and he could seldom pick up more than three eggs under water to Ralph's half-dozen. He was beaten, too, in jumping and running. Why will silly mortals strive to the painful pinnacles of championship? Or why, once having reached them, not have the magnanimity and circumspection to retire into private life immediately? Stung by his defeats, Richard sent one of his dependent Papworths to Poer Hall, with a challenge to Ralph Barthrop Morton; matching himself to swim across the Thames

and back, once, twice, or thrice, within a less time than he, Ralph Barthrop Morton, would require for the undertaking. It was accepted, and a reply returned, equally formal in the trumpeting of Christian names, wherein Ralph Barthrop Morton acknowledged the challenge of Richard Doria Feverel, and was his man. The match came off on a midsummer morning, under the direction of Captain Algernon. Sir Austin was a spectator from the cover of a plantation by the river-side, unknown to his son, and, to the scandal of her sex, Lady Blandish accompanied the baronet. He had invited her attendance, and she, obeying her frank nature, and knowing what *The Pilgrim's Scrip* said about prudes, at once agreed to view the match, pleasing him mightily. For was not here a woman worthy the golden ages of the world? One who could look upon man as a creature divinely made, and look with a mind neither tempted, nor taunted, by the serpent! Such a woman was rare. Sir Austin did not discompose her by uttering his praises. She was conscious of his approval only in an increased gentleness of manner, and something in his voice and communications, as if he were speaking to a familiar, a very high compliment from him. While the lads were standing ready for the signal to plunge from the steep decline of greensward into the shining waters, Sir Austin called upon her to admire their beauty, and she did, and even advanced her head above his shoulder delicately. In so doing, and just as the start was given, a bonnet became visible to Richard. Young Ralph was heels in air before he moved, and then he dropped like lead. He was beaten by several lengths.

The result of the match was unaccountable to all present, and Richard's friends unanimously pressed him to plead a false start. But though the youth, with full confidence in his better style and equal strength, had backed himself heavily against his rival, and had lost his little river-yacht to Ralph, he would do nothing of the sort. It was the bonnet had beaten him, not Ralph. The bonnet, typical of the mystery that caused his heart those violent palpitations, was his dear, detestable enemy.

And now, as he progressed from mood to mood, his

ambition turned towards a field where Ralph could not rival him, and where the bonnet was etherealized, and reigned glorious mistress. A check to the pride of a boy will frequently divert him to the path where lie his subtlest powers. Richard gave up his companions, servile or antagonistic: he relinquished the material world to young Ralph, and retired into himself, where he was growing to be lord of kingdoms: where Beauty was his handmaid, and History his minister, and Time his ancient harper, and sweet Romance his bride; where he walked in a realm vaster and more gorgeous than the great Orient, peopled with the heroes that have been. For there is no princely wealth, and no loftiest heritage, to equal this early one that is made bountifully common to so many, when the ripening blood has put a spark to the imagination, and the earth is seen through rosy mists of a thousand fresh-awakened nameless and aimless desires; panting for bliss and taking it as it comes; making of any sight or sound, perforce of the enchantment they carry with them, a key to infinite, because innocent, pleasure. The passions then are gambolling cubs; not the ravaging gluttons they grow to. They have their teeth and their talons, but they neither tear nor bite. They are in counsel and fellowship with the quickened heart and brain. The whole sweet system moves to music.

Something akin to the indications of a change in the spirit of his son, which were now seen, Sir Austin had marked down to be expected, as due to his plan. The blushes of the youth, his long vigils, his clinging to solitude, his abstraction, and downcast but not melancholy air, were matters for rejoicing to the prescient gentleman. 'For it comes,' said he to Dr. Clifford of Lobourne, after consulting him medically on the youth's behalf and being assured of his soundness, 'it comes of a thoroughly sane condition. The blood is healthy, the mind virtuous: neither instigates the other to evil, and both are perfecting toward the flower of manhood. If he reach that pure—in the untainted fullness and perfection of his natural powers—I am, indeed, a happy father! But one thing he will owe to me: that at one period of his life he knew

paradise, and could read God's handwriting on the earth! Now those abominations whom you call precocious boys —your little pet monsters, doctor—and who can wonder that the world is what it is when it is full of them?—as they will have no divine time to look back upon in their own lives, how can they believe in innocence and goodness, or be other than sons of selfishness and the devil? But my boy,' and the baronet dropped his voice to a key that was touching to hear, 'my boy, if he fall, will fall from an actual region of purity. He dare not be a sceptic as to that. Whatever his darkness, he will have the guiding light of a memory behind him. So much is secure.'

To talk nonsense, or poetry, or the dash between the two, in a tone of profound sincerity, and to enunciate solemn discordances with received opinion so seriously as to convey the impression of a spiritual insight, is the peculiar gift by which monomaniacs, having first persuaded themselves, contrive to influence their neighbours, and through them to make conquest of a good half of the world, for good or for ill. Sir Austin had this gift. He spoke as if he saw the truth, and, persisting in it so long, he was accredited by those who did not understand him, and silenced them that did.

'We shall see,' was all the argument left to Dr. Clifford, and other unbelievers.

So far certainly the experiment had succeeded. A comelier, braver, better boy was nowhere to be met. His promise was undeniable. The vessel, too, though it lay now in harbour and had not yet been proved by the buffets of the elements on the great ocean, had made a good trial trip, and got well through stormy weather, as the records of the Bakewell comedy witnessed to at Raynham. No augury could be more hopeful. The Fates must, indeed, be hard, the ordeal severe, the destiny dark, that could destroy so bright a spring! But, bright as it was, the baronet relaxed nothing of his vigilant supervision. He said to his intimates: 'Every act, every fostered inclination, almost every thought, in this blossoming season, bears its seed for the future. The living tree now requires incessant watchfulness.' And, acting up to his light,

Sir Austin did watch. The youth submitted to an examination every night before he sought his bed; professedly to give an account of his studies, but really to recapitulate his moral experiences of the day. He could do so, for he was pure. Any wildness in him that his father noted, any remoteness or richness of fancy in his expressions, was set down as incidental to the blossoming season. There is nothing like a theory for blinding the wise. Sir Austin, despite his rigid watch and ward, knew less of his son than the servant of his household. And he was deaf, as well as blind. Adrian thought it his duty to tell him that the youth was consuming paper. Lady Blandish likewise hinted at his mooning propensities. Sir Austin from his lofty watch-tower of the System had foreseen it, he said. But when he came to hear that the youth was writing poetry, his wounded heart had its reasons for being much disturbed.

'Surely,' said Lady Blandish, 'you knew he scribbled?'

'A very different thing from writing poetry,' said the baronet. 'No Feverel has ever written poetry.'

'I don't think it 's a sign of degeneracy,' the lady remarked. 'He rhymes very prettily to me.'

A London phrenologist, and a friendly Oxford professor of poetry, quieted Sir Austin's fears.

The phrenologist said he was totally deficient in the imitative faculty; and the professor, that he was equally so in the rhythmic, and instanced several consoling false quantities in the few effusions submitted to him. Added to this, Sir Austin told Lady Blandish that Richard had, at his best, done what no poet had ever been known to be capable of doing: he had, with his own hands, and in cold blood, committed his virgin manuscript to the flames: which made Lady Blandish sigh forth, 'Poor boy!'

Killing one's darling child is a painful imposition. For a youth in his blossoming season, who fancies himself a poet, to be requested to destroy his first-born, without a reason (though to pretend a reason cogent enough to justify the request were a mockery), is a piece of abhorrent despotism, and Richard's blossoms withered under it. A strange man had been introduced to him, who traversed

and bisected his skull with sagacious stiff fingers, and crushed his soul while, in an infallible voice, declaring him the animal he was: making him feel such an animal! Not only his blossoms withered, his being seemed to draw in its shoots and twigs. And when, coupled thereunto (the strange man having departed, his work done), his father, in his tenderest manner, stated that it would give him pleasure to see those same precocious, utterly valueless, scribblings among the cinders, the last remaining mental blossoms spontaneously fell away. Richard's spirit stood bare. He protested not. Enough that it could be wished! He would not delay a minute in doing it. Desiring his father to follow him, he went to a drawer in his room, and from a clean-linen recess, never suspected by Sir Austin, the secretive youth drew out bundle after bundle: each neatly tied, named, and numbered: and pitched them into flames. And so, farewell my young ambition! and with it farewell all true confidence between father and son.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAGNETIC AGE

It was now, as Sir Austin had written it down, the magnetic age: the age of violent attractions, when to hear mention of love is dangerous, and to see it, a communication of the disease. People at Raynham were put on their guard by the baronet, and his reputation for wisdom was severely criticized in consequence of the injunctions he thought fit to issue through butler and housekeeper down to the lower household, for the preservation of his son from any visible symptom of the passion. A footman and two housemaids are believed to have been dismissed on the report of Heavy Benson that they were in or inclining to the state; upon which an under-cook and a dairymaid voluntarily threw up their places, averring that 'they did not want no young men, but to have their sex spied after by an old wretch like that,' indicating the ponderous butler, 'was a little too much for a Christian woman,' and then they were ungenerous enough to glance at Benson's well-known marital calamity, hinting that some men met their deserts. So intolerable did Heavy Benson's espionage become, that Raynham would have grown depopulated of its womankind had not Adrian interfered, who pointed out to the baronet what a fearful arm his butler was wielding. Sir Austin acknowledged it despondently. 'It only shows,' said he, with a fine spirit of justice, 'how all but impossible it is to legislate where there are women!'

'I do not object,' he added; 'I hope I am too just to object to the exercise of their natural inclinations. All I ask from them is discreetness.'

'Ay,' said Adrian, whose discreetness was a marvel.

'No gadding about in couples,' continued the baronet, 'no kissing in public. Such occurrences no boy should witness. Whenever people of both sexes are thrown

together, they will be silly; and where they are high-fed, uneducated, and barely occupied, it must be looked for as a matter of course. Let it be known that I only require discreetness.'

Discreetness, therefore, was instructed to reign at the abbey. Under Adrian's able tuition the fairest of its domestics acquired that virtue.

Discreetness, too, was enjoined to the upper household. Sir Austin, who had not previously appeared to notice the case of Lobourne's hopeless curate, now desired Mrs. Doria to interdict, or at least discourage, his visits, for the appearance of the man was that of an embodied sigh and groan.

'Really, Austin!' said Mrs. Doria, astonished to find her brother more awake than she had supposed; 'I have never allowed him to hope.'

'Let him see it, then,' replied the baronet; 'let him see it.'

'The man amuses me,' said Mrs. Doria. 'You know, we have few amusements here, we inferior creatures. I confess I should like a barrel-organ better; that reminds one of town and the opera; and besides, it plays more than one tune. However, since you think my society bad for him, let him stop away.'

With the self-devotion of a woman she grew patient and sweet the moment her daughter Clare was spoken of, and the business of her life in view. Mrs. Doria's maternal heart had betrothed the two cousins, Richard and Clare; had already beheld them espoused and fruitful. For this she yielded the pleasures of town; for this she immured herself at Raynham; for this she bore with a thousand follies, exactions, inconveniences, things abhorrent to her, and heaven knows what forms of torture and self-denial, which are smilingly endured by that greatest of voluntary martyrs—a mother with a daughter to marry. Mrs. Doria, an amiable widow, had surely married but for her daughter Clare. The lady's hair no woman could possess without feeling it her pride. It was the daily theme of her lady's-maid, a natural aureole to her head. She was gay, witty, still physically youthful enough to claim a destiny; and she sacrificed it to accomplish her daughter's! Sacrificed, as

with heroic scissors, hair, wit, gaiety—let us not attempt to enumerate how much—more than may be said. And she was only one of thousands; thousands who have no portion of the hero's reward; for he may reckon on applause, and condolence, and sympathy, and honour; they, poor slaves! must look for nothing but the opposition of their own sex and the sneers of ours. Oh, Sir Austin! had you not been so blinded, what an aphorism might have sprung from this point of observation! Mrs. Doria was coolly told, between sister and brother, that during the magnetic age her daughter's presence at Raynham was undesirable. Instead of nursing offence, her sole thought was the mountain of prejudice she had to contend against. She bowed, and said Clare wanted sea-air—she had never quite recovered the shock of that dreadful night. How long, Mrs. Doria wished to know, might the peculiar period be expected to last?

'That,' said Sir Austin, 'depends. A year, perhaps. He is entering on it. I shall be most grieved to lose you, Helen. Clare is now—how old?'

'Seventeen.'

'She is marriageable.'

'Marriageable, Austin! At seventeen! Don't name such a thing. My child shall not be robbed of her youth.'

'Our women marry early, Helen.'

'My child shall not!'

The baronet reflected a moment. He did not wish to lose his sister.

'As you are of that opinion, Helen,' said he, 'perhaps we may still make arrangements to retain you with us. Would you think it advisable to send Clare—she should know discipline—to some establishment for a few months?'

'To an asylum, Austin?' cried Mrs. Doria, controlling her indignation as well as she could.

'To some select, superior seminary, Helen. There are such to be found.'

'Austin!' Mrs. Doria exclaimed, and had to fight with a moisture in her eyes. 'Unjust! absurd!' she murmured. The baronet thought it a natural proposition that Clare should be a bride or a schoolgirl.

'I cannot leave my child.' Mrs. Doria trembled. 'Where she goes, I go. I am aware that she is only one of our sex, and therefore of no value to the world, but she is my child. I will see, poor dear, that you have no cause to complain of her.'

'I thought,' Sir Austin remarked, 'that you acquiesced in my views with regard to my son.'

'Yes—generally,' said Mrs. Doria, and felt culpable that she had not before, and could not then, tell her brother that he had set up an idol in his house—an idol of flesh! more retributive and abominable than wood or brass or gold. But she had bowed to the idol too long —she had too entirely bound herself to gain her project by subserviency. She had, and she dimly perceived it, committed a greater fault in tactics, in teaching her daughter to bow to the idol also. Love of that kind Richard took for tribute. He was indifferent to Clare's soft eyes. The parting kiss he gave her was ready and cold as his father could desire. Sir Austin now grew eloquent to him in laudation of manly pursuits: but Richard thought his eloquence barren, his attempts at companionship awkward, and all manly pursuits and aims, life itself, vain and worthless. To what end? sighed the blossomless youth, and cried aloud, as soon as he was relieved of his father's society, what was the good of anything? Whatever he did—whichever path he selected, led back to Raynham. And whatever he did, however wretched and wayward he showed himself, only confirmed Sir Austin more and more in the truth of his previsions. Tom Bakewell, now the youth's groom, had to give the baronet a report of his young master's proceedings, in common with Adrian, and while there was no harm to tell Tom spoke out. 'He do ride like fire every day to Pig's Snout,' naming the highest hill in the neighbourhood, 'and stand there and stare, never movin', like a mad 'un. And then hoam agin all slack as if he 'd been beaten in a race by somebody.'

'There is no woman in that!' mused the baronet. 'He would have ridden back as hard as he went,' reflected this profound scientific humanist, 'had there been a woman

in it. He would shun vast expanses, and seek shade, concealment, solitude. The desire for distances betokens emptiness and undirected hunger: when the heart is possessed by an image we fly to wood and forest, like the guilty.'

Adrian's report accused his pupil of an extraordinary access of cynicism.

'Exactly,' said the baronet. 'As I foresaw. At this period an insatiate appetite is accompanied by a fastidious palate. Nothing but the quintessences of existence, and those in exhaustless supplies, will satisfy this craving, which is not to be satisfied! Hence his bitterness. Life can furnish no food fitting for him. The strength and purity of his energies have reached to an almost divine height, and roam through the inane. Poetry, love, and such-like, are the drugs earth has to offer to high natures, as she offers to low ones debauchery. 'Tis a sign, this sourness, that he is subject to none of the empiricisms that are afloat. Now to keep him clear of them!'

The Titans had an easier task in storming Olympus. As yet, however, it could not be said that Sir Austin's System had failed. On the contrary, it had reared a youth, handsome, intelligent, well-bred, and, observed the ladies, with acute emphasis, innocent. Where, they asked, was such another young man to be found?

'Oh!' said Lady Blandish to Sir Austin, 'if men could give their hands to women unsoiled—how different would many a marriage be! She will be a happy girl who calls Richard husband.'

'Happy, indeed!' was the baronet's caustic ejaculation. 'But where shall I meet one equal to him, and his match?'

'I was innocent when I was a girl,' said the lady.

Sir Austin bowed a reserved opinion.

'Do you think no girls innocent?'

Sir Austin gallantly thought them all so.

'No, that you know they are not,' said the lady, stamping. 'But they are more innocent than boys, I am sure.'

'Because of their education, madam. You see now what a youth can be. Perhaps, when my System is published, or rather—to speak more humbly—when it is

practised, the balance may be restored, and we shall have virtuous young men.'

'It 's too late for poor me to hope for a husband from one of them,' said the lady, pouting and laughing.

'It is never too late for beauty to waken love,' returned the baronet, and they trifled a little. They were approaching Daphne's Bower, which they entered, and sat there to taste the coolness of a descending midsummer day.

The baronet seemed in a humour for dignified fooling; the lady for serious converse.

'I shall believe again in Arthur's knights,' she said. 'When I was a girl I dreamed of one.'

'And he was in quest of the San Greal?'

'If you like.'

'And showed his good taste by turning aside for the more tangible San Blandish?'

'Of course you consider it would have been so,' sighed the lady, ruffling.

'I can only judge by our generation,' said Sir Austin, with a bend of homage.

The lady gathered her mouth. 'Either we are very mighty or you are very weak.'

'Both, madam.'

'But whatever we are, and if we are bad, bad! we love virtue, and truth, and lofty souls, in men: and, when we meet those qualities in them, we are constant, and would die for them—die for them. Ah! you know men but not women.'

'The knights possessing such distinctions must be young, I presume?' said Sir Austin.

'Old or young!'

'But if old, they are scarce capable of enterprise?'

'They are loved for themselves, not for their deeds.'

'Ah!'

'Yes—ah!' said the lady. 'Intellect may subdue women —make slaves of them; and they worship beauty perhaps as much as you do. But they only love for ever and are mated when they meet a noble nature.'

Sir Austin looked at her wistfully.

'And did you encounter the knight of your dream?'

'Not then.' She lowered her eyelids. It was prettily done.

'And how did you bear the disappointment?'

'My dream was in the nursery. The day my frock was lengthened to a gown I stood at the altar. I am not the only girl that has been made a woman in a day, and given to an ogre instead of a true knight.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Sir Austin, 'women have much to bear.'

Here the couple changed characters. The lady became gay as the baronet grew earnest.

'You know it is our lot,' she said. 'And we are allowed many amusements. If we fulfil our duty in producing children, that, like our virtue, is its own reward. Then, as a widow, I have wonderful privileges.'

'To preserve which, you remain a widow?'

'Certainly,' she responded. 'I have no trouble now in patching and piecing that rag the world calls—a character. I can sit at your feet every day unquestioned. To be sure, others do the same, but they are female eccentrics, and have cast off the rag altogether.'

Sir Austin drew nearer to her. 'You would have made an admirable mother, madam.'

This from Sir Austin was very like positive wooing.

'It is,' he continued, 'ten thousand pities that you are not one.'

'Do you think so?' She spoke with humility.

'I would,' he went on, 'that Heaven had given you a daughter.'

'Would you have thought her worthy of Richard?'

'Our blood, madam, should have been one!'

The lady tapped her toe with her parasol. 'But I am a mother,' she said. 'Richard is my son. Yes, Richard is my boy,' she reiterated.

Sir Austin most graciously appended, 'Call him ours, madam,' and held his head as if to catch the word from her lips, which, however, she chose to refuse, or defer. They made the coloured west a common point for their eyes, and then Sir Austin said:

'As you will not say "ours," let me. And, as you have

therefore an equal claim on the boy, I will confide to you a project I have lately conceived.'

The announcement of a project hardly savoured of a coming proposal, but for Sir Austin to confide one to a woman was almost tantamount to a declaration. So Lady Blandish thought, and so said her soft, deep-eyed smile, as she perused the ground while listening to the project. It concerned Richard's nuptials. He was now nearly eighteen. He was to marry when he was five-and-twenty. Meantime a young lady, some years his junior, was to be sought for in the homes of England, who would be every way fitted by education, instincts, and blood—on each of which qualifications Sir Austin unreservedly enlarged—to espouse so perfect a youth and accept the honourable duty of assisting in the perpetuation of the Feverels. The baronet went on to say that he proposed to set forth immediately, and devote a couple of months, to the first essay in his Coelebite search.

'I fear,' said Lady Blandish, when the project had been fully unfolded, 'you have laid down for yourself a difficult task. You must not be too exacting.'

'I know it.' The baronet's shake of the head was piteous.

'Even in England she will be rare. But I confine myself to no class. If I ask for blood it is for untainted, not what you call high blood. I believe many of the middle classes are frequently more careful—more pure-blooded—than our aristocracy. Show me among them a God-fearing family who educate their children—I should prefer a girl without brothers and sisters—as a Christian damsel should be educated—say, on the model of my son, and she may be penniless, I will pledge her to Richard Feverel.'

Lady Blandish bit her lip. 'And what do you do with Richard while you are absent on this expedition?'

'Oh!' said the baronet, 'he accompanies his father.'

'Then give it up. His future bride is now pinafored and bread-and-buttery. She romps, she cries, she dreams of play and pudding. How can he care for her? He thinks more at his age of old women like me. He will be certain to kick against her, and destroy your plan, believe me, Sir Austin.'

'Ay, ay, do you think that?' said the baronet.

Lady Blandish gave him a multitude of reasons.

'Ay, true,' he muttered. 'Adrian said the same. He must not see her. How could I think of it! The child is naked woman. He would despise her. Naturally!'

'Naturally!' echoed the lady.

'Then, madam,' and the baronet rose, 'there is one thing for me to determine upon. I must, for the first time in his life, leave him.'

'Will you, indeed?' said the lady.

'It is my duty, having thus brought him up, to see that he is properly mated—not wrecked upon the quicksands of marriage, as a youth so delicately trained might be; more easily than another! Betrothed, he will be safe from a thousand snares. I may, I think, leave him for a term. My precautions have saved him from the temptations of his season.'

'And under whose charge will you leave him?' Lady Blandish inquired.

She had emerged from the temple, and stood beside Sir Austin on the upper steps, under a clear summer twilight.

'Madam!' he took her hand, and his voice was gallant and tender; 'under whose but yours?'

As the baronet said this, he bent above her hand, and raised it to his lips.

Lady Blandish felt that she had been wooed and asked in wedlock. She did not withdraw her hand. The baronet's salute was flatteringly reverent. He deliberated over it, as one going through a grave ceremony. And he, the scorner of women, had chosen her for his homage! Lady Blandish forgot that she had taken some trouble to arrive at it. She received the exquisite compliment in all its unique honeysweet: for in love we must deserve nothing or the fine bloom of fruition is gone.

The lady's hand was still in durance, and the baronet had not recovered from his profound inclination, when a noise from the neighbouring beechwood startled the two actors in this courtly pantomime. They turned their heads, and beheld the Hope of Raynham on horseback surveying the scene. The next moment he had galloped away.

CHAPTER XIV

AN ATTRACTION

ALL night Richard tossed on his bed with his heart in a rapid canter, and his brain bestriding it, traversing the rich, untasted world, and the great realm of mystery, from which he was now restrained no longer. Months he had wandered about the gates of the Bonnet, wondering, sighing, knocking at them, and getting neither admittance nor answer. He had the key now. His own father had given it to him. His heart was a lightning steed, and bore him on and on over limitless regions bathed in superhuman beauty and strangeness, where cavaliers and ladies leaned whispering upon close green swards, and knights and ladies cast a splendour upon savage forests, and tilts and tourneys were held in golden courts lit to a glorious day by ladies' eyes, one pair of which, dimly visioned, constantly distinguishable, followed him through the boskage and dwelt upon him in the press, beaming while he bent above a hand glittering white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a May night.

Awhile the heart would pause and flutter to a shock: he was in the act of consummating all earthly bliss by pressing his lips to the small, white hand. 'Only to do that and die!' cried the Magnetic Youth; 'to fling the jewel of life into that one cup and drink it off!' He was intoxicated by anticipation. For that he was born. There was, then, some end in existence, something to live for! to kiss a woman's hand, and die! He would leap from the couch, and rush to pen and paper to relieve his swarming sensations. Scarce was he seated when the pen was dashed aside, the paper sent flying with the exclamation: 'Have I not sworn I would never write again?' Sir Austin had shut that safety-valve. The nonsense that was in the youth might have poured harmlessly out, and its urgency

for ebullition was so great that he was repeatedly oblivious of his oath, and found himself seated under the lamp in the act of composition before pride could speak a word. Possibly the pride even of Richard Feverel had been swamped if the act of composition were easy at such a time, and a single idea could stand clearly foremost; but myriads were demanding the first place; chaotic hosts, like ranks of stormy billows, pressed impetuously for expression, and despair of reducing them to form, quite as much as pride, to which it pleased him to refer his incapacity, threw down the powerless pen, and sent him panting to his outstretched length and another headlong career through the rosy-girdled land.

Toward morning the madness of the fever abated somewhat, and he went forth into the air. A lamp was still burning in his father's room, and Richard thought, as he looked up, that he saw the ever-vigilant head on the watch. Instantly the lamp was extinguished, the window stood cold against the hues of dawn.

Strong pulling is an excellent medical remedy for certain classes of fever. Richard took to it instinctively. The clear fresh water, burnished with sunrise, sparkled against his arrowy prow; the soft deep shadows curled smiling away from his gliding keel. Overhead solitary morning unfolded itself, from blossom to bud, from bud to flower; still, delicious changes of light and colour, to whose influences he was heedless as he shot under willows and aspens, and across sheets of river-reaches, pure mirrors to the upper glory, himself the sole tenant of the stream. Somewhere at the founts of the world lay the land he was rowing toward; something of its shadowed lights might be discerned here and there. It was not a dream, now he knew. There was a secret abroad. The woods were full of it; the waters rolled with it, and the winds. Oh, why could not one in these days do some high knightly deed which should draw down ladies' eyes from their heaven, as in the days of Arthur! To such a meaning breathed the unconscious sighs of the youth, when he had pulled through his first feverish energy.

He was off Bursley, and had lapsed a little into that

musing quietude which follows strenuous exercise, when he heard a hail and his own name called. It was no lady, no fairy, but young Ralph Morton, an irruption of miserable masculine prose. Heartily wishing him abed with the rest of mankind, Richard rowed in and jumped ashore. Ralph immediately seized his arm, saying that he desired earnestly to have a talk with him, and dragged the Magnetic Youth from his water-dreams, up and down the wet mown grass. That he had to say seemed to be difficult of utterance, and Richard, though he barely listened, soon had enough of his old rival's gladness at seeing him, and exhibited signs of impatience; whereat Ralph, as one who branches into matter somewhat foreign to his mind, but of great human interest and importance, put the question to him:

'I say, what woman's name do you like best?'

'I don't know any,' quoth Richard indifferently. 'Why are you out so early?'

In answer to this, Ralph suggested that the name of Mary might be considered a pretty name.

Richard agreed that it might be; the housekeeper at Raynham, half the women cooks, and all the housemaids, enjoyed that name; the name of Mary was equivalent for woman at home.

'Yes, I know,' said Ralph. 'We have lots of Marys. It 's so common. Oh! I don't like Mary best. What do you think of Lucy?'

Richard thought it just like another.

'Do you know,' Ralph continued, throwing off the mask and plunging into the subject, 'I 'd do anything on earth for some names—one or two. It 's not Mary, nor Lucy. Clarinda 's pretty, but it 's like a novel. Claribel, I like. Names beginning with "Cl" I prefer. The "Cl's" are always gentle and lovely girls you would die for! Don't you think so?'

Richard never had been acquainted with any of them to inspire that emotion. Indeed these urgent appeals to his fancy in feminine names at five o'clock in the morning slightly surprised him, though he was but half awake to the outer world. By degrees he perceived that Ralph was

changed. Instead of the lusty boisterous boy, his rival in manly sciences, who spoke straightforwardly and acted up to his speech, here was an abashed and blush-persecuted youth, who sued piteously for a friendly ear wherein to pour the one idea possessing him. Gradually, too, Richard apprehended that Ralph likewise was on the frontiers of the realm of mystery, perhaps further toward it than he himself was; and then, as by a sympathetic stroke, was revealed to him the wonderful beauty and depth of meaning in feminine names. The theme appeared novel and delicious, fitted to the season and the hour. But the hardship was that Richard could choose none from the number; all were the same to him; he loved them all.

'Don't you really prefer the "Cl's"?' said Ralph persuasively.

'Not better than the names ending in "a" and "y,"' Richard replied, wishing he could, for Ralph was evidently ahead of him.

'Come under these trees,' said Ralph. And under the trees Ralph unbosomed. His name was down for the army: Eton was quitted for ever. In a few months he would have to join his regiment, and before he left he must say good-bye to his friends. . . . Would Richard tell him Mrs. Forey's address? he had heard she was somewhere by the sea. Richard did not remember the address, but said he would willingly take charge of any letter and forward it.

Ralph dived his hand into his pocket. 'Here it is. But don't let anybody see it.'

'My aunt's name is not Clare,' said Richard, perusing what was composed of the exterior formula. 'You 've addressed it to Clare herself.'

That was plain to see.

'Emmeline Clementina Matilda Laura, Countess Blandish,' Richard continued in a low tone, transferring the names, and playing on the musical strings they were to him. Then he said: 'Names of ladies! How they sweeten their names!'

He fixed his eyes on Ralph. If he discovered anything further he said nothing, but bade the good fellow good-bye, jumped into his boat, and pulled down the tide.

The moment Ralph was hidden by an abutment of the banks, Richard reperused the address. For the first time it struck him that his cousin Clare was a very charming creature: he remembered the look of her eyes, and especially the last reproachful glance she gave him at parting. What business had Ralph to write to her? Did she not belong to Richard Feverel? He read the words again and again: Clare Doria Forey. Why, Clare was the name he liked best—nay, he loved it. Doria, too—she shared his own name with him. Away went his heart, not at a canter now, at a gallop, as one who sights the quarry. He felt too weak to pull. Clare Doria Forey—oh, perfect melody! Sliding with the tide, he heard it fluting in the bosom of the hills.

When nature has made us ripe for love, it seldom occurs that the Fates are behindhand in furnishing a temple for the flame.

Above green-flashing plunges of a weir, and shaken by the thunder below, lilies, golden and white, were swaying at anchor among the reeds. Meadow-sweet hung from the banks thick with weed and trailing bramble, and there also hung a daughter of earth. Her face was shaded by a broad straw hat with a flexible brim that left her lips and chin in the sun, and, sometimes nodding, sent forth a light of promising eyes. Across her shoulders, and behind, flowed large loose curls, brown in shadow, almost golden where the ray touched them. She was simply dressed, befitting decency and the season. On a closer inspection you might see that her lips were stained. This blooming young person was regaling on dewberries. They grew between the bank and the water. Apparently she found the fruit abundant, for her hand was making pretty progress to her mouth. Fastidious youth, which revolts at woman plumping her exquisite proportions on bread and butter, and would (we must suppose) joyfully have her scraggy to have her poetical, can hardly object to dewberries. Indeed the act of eating them is dainty and induces musing. The dewberry is a sister to the lotus, and an innocent sister. You eat: mouth, eye, and hand are occupied, and the undrugged mind free to roam. And so it was with the damsel who knelt there. The little

skylark went up above her, all song, to the smooth southern cloud lying along the blue: from a dewy copse dark over her nodding hat the blackbird fluted, calling to her with thrice mellow note: the kingfisher flashed emerald out of green osiers: a bow-winged heron travelled aloft, seeking solitude: a boat slipped toward her, containing a dreamy youth; and still she plucked the fruit, and ate, and mused, as if no fairy prince were invading her territories, and as if she wished not for one, or knew not her wishes. Surrounded by the green shaven meadows, the pastoral summer buzz, the weirfall's thundering white, amid the breath and beauty of wild flowers, she was a bit of lovely human life in a fair setting; a terrible attraction. The Magnetic Youth leaned round to note his proximity to the weir-piles, and beheld the sweet vision. Stiller and stiller grew nature, as at the meeting of two electric clouds. Her posture was so graceful, that though he was making straight for the weir, he dared not dip a scull. Just then one enticing dewberry caught her eyes. He was floating by unheeded, and saw that her hand stretched low, and could not gather what it sought. A stroke from his right brought him beside her. The damsel glanced up dismayed, and her whole shape trembled over the brink. Richard sprang from his boat into the water. Pressing a hand beneath her foot, which she had thrust against the crumbling wet sides of the bank to save herself, he enabled her to recover her balance, and gain safe earth, whither he followed her.

CHAPTER XV

FERDINAND AND MIRANDA

He had landed on an island of the still-vexed Bermoothes. The world lay wrecked behind him: Raynham hung in mists, remote, a phantom to the vivid reality of this white hand which had drawn him thither away thousands of leagues in an eye-twinkle. Hark, how Ariel sang overhead! What splendour in the heavens! What marvels of beauty about his enchanted brows! And, oh, you wonder! Fair Flame! by whose light the glories of being are now first seen. . . . Radiant Miranda! Prince Ferdinand is at your feet.

Or is it Adam, his rib taken from his side in sleep, and thus transformed, to make him behold his Paradise, and lose it? . . .

The youth looked on her with as glowing an eye. It was the First Woman to him.

And she—mankind was all Caliban to her, saving this one princely youth.

So to each other said their changing eyes in the moment they stood together; he pale and she blushing.

She was indeed sweetly fair, and would have been held fair among rival damsels. On a magic shore, and to a youth educated by a System, strung like an arrow drawn to the head, he, it might be guessed, could fly fast and far with her. The soft rose in her cheeks, the clearness of her eyes, bore witness to the body's virtue; and health and happy blood were in her bearing. Had she stood before Sir Austin among rival damsels, that scientific humanist, for the consummation of his System, would have thrown her the handkerchief for his son. The wide summer-hat, nodding over her forehead to her brows, seemed to flow with the flowing heavy curls, and those fire-threaded mellow curls, only half-curls, waves of hair call them,

rippling at the ends, went like a sunny red-veined torrent down her back almost to her waist: a glorious vision to the youth, who embraced it as a flower of beauty, and read not a feature. There were curious features of colour in her face for him to have read. Her brows, thick and brownish against a soft skin showing the action of the blood, met in the bend of a bow, extending to the temples long and level: you saw that she was fashioned to peruse the sights of earth, and by the pliability of her brows that the wonderful creature used her faculty, and was not going to be a statue to the gazer. Under the dark thick brows an arch of lashes shot out, giving a wealth of darkness to the full frank blue eyes, a mystery of meaning—more than brain was ever meant to fathom: richer, henceforth, than all mortal wisdom to Prince Ferdinand. For when nature turns artist, and produces contrasts of colour on a fair face, where is the sage, or what the oracle, shall match the depth of its lightest look?

Prince Ferdinand was also fair. In his slim boating-attire his figure looked heroic. His hair, rising from the parting to the right of his forehead, in what his admiring Lady Blandish called his plume, fell away slanting silkily to the temples across the nearly imperceptible upward curve of his brows there—felt more than seen, so slight it was—and gave to his profile a bold beauty, to which his bashful, breathless air was a flattering charm. An arrow drawn to the head, capable of flying fast and far with her! He leaned a little forward, drinking her in with all his eyes, and young Love has a thousand. Then truly the system triumphed, just ere it was to fall; and could Sir Austin have been content to draw the arrow to the head, and let it fly, when it would fly, he might have pointed to his son again, and said to the world, 'Match him!' Such keen bliss as the youth had in the sight of her, an innocent youth alone has powers of soul in him to experience.

'O Women!' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, in one of its solitary outbursts, 'Women, who like, and will have for hero, a rake! how soon are you not to learn that you have taken bankrupts to your bosoms, and that the putrescent gold that attracted you is the slime of the Lake of Sin!'

If these two were Ferdinand and Miranda, Sir Austin was not Prospero, and was not present, or their fates might have been different.

So they stood a moment, changing eyes, and then Miranda spoke, and they came down to earth, feeling no less in heaven.

She spoke to thank him for his aid. She used quite common simple words; and used them, no doubt, to express a common simple meaning: but to him she was uttering magic, casting spells, and the effect they had on him was manifested in the incoherence of his replies, which were too foolish to be chronicled.

The couple were again mute. Suddenly Miranda, with an exclamation of anguish, and innumerable lights and shadows playing over her lovely face, clapped her hands, crying aloud: 'My book! my book!' and ran to the bank.

Prince Ferdinand was at her side. 'What have you lost?' he said.

'My book!' she answered, her delicious curls swinging across her shoulders to the stream. Then turning to him: 'Oh, no, no! let me entreat you not to,' she said, 'I do not so very much mind losing it.' And in her eagerness to restrain him she unconsciously laid her gentle hand upon his arm, and took the force of motion out of him.

'Indeed, I do not really care for the silly book,' she continued, withdrawing her hand quickly, and reddening. 'Pray, do not!'

The young gentleman had kicked off his shoes. No sooner was the spell of contact broken than he jumped in. The water was still troubled and discoloured by his introductory adventure, and, though he ducked his head with the spirit of a dabchick, the book was missing. A scrap of paper floating from the bramble just above the water, and looking as if fire had caught its edges and it had flown from one adverse element to the other, was all he could lay hold of; and he returned to land disconsolately, to hear Miranda's murmured mixing of thanks and pretty expostulations.

'Let me try again,' he said.

'No, indeed!' she replied, and used the awful threat: 'I will run away if you do,' which effectually restrained him.

Her eye fell on the fire-stained scrap of paper, and brightened, as she cried: 'There, there! you have what I want. It is that. I do not care for the book. No, please! You are not to look at it. Give it me.'

Before her playfully imperative injunction was fairly spoken, Richard had glanced at the document and discovered a griffin between two wheatsheaves; his crest in silver; and below—O wonderment immense! his own handwriting!

He handed it to her. She took it, and put it in her bosom.

Who would have thought, that, where all else perished, odes, idylls, lines, stanzas, this one sonnet to the stars should be miraculously reserved for such a starry fate—passing beatitude!

As they walked silently across the meadow, Richard strove to remember the hour and the mood of mind in which he had composed the notable production. The stars were invoked, as seeing and foreseeing all, to tell him where then his love reclined, and so forth; Hesper was complacent enough to do so, and describe her in a couplet:

> Through sunset's amber see me shining fair,
> As her blue eyes shine through her golden hair.

And surely no words could be more prophetic. Here were two blue eyes and golden hair, and by some strange chance, that appeared like the working of a divine finger, she had become the possessor of the prophecy, she that was to fulfil it! The youth was too charged with emotion to speak. Doubtless the damsel had less to think of, or had some trifling burden on her conscience, for she seemed to grow embarrassed. At last she drew up her chin to look at her companion under the nodding brim of her hat (and the action gave her a charmingly freakish air), crying: 'But where are you going to? You are wet through. Let me thank you again; and, pray, leave me, and go home and change instantly.'

'Wet?' replied the magnetic muser, with a voice of

tender interest; 'not more than one foot, I hope. I will leave you while you dry your stockings in the sun.'

At this she could not withhold a shy laugh.

'Not I, but you. You would try to get that silly book for me, and you are dripping wet. Are you not very uncomfortable?'

In all sincerity he assured her that he was not.

'And you really do not feel that you are wet?'

He really did not: and it was a fact that he spoke truth.

She pursed her dewberry mouth in the most comical way, and her blue eyes lightened laughter out of the half-closed lids.

'I cannot help it,' she said, her mouth opening, and sounding harmonious bells of laughter in his ears. 'Pardon me, won't you?'

His face took the same soft smiling curves in admiration of her.

'Not to feel that you have been in the water, the very moment after!' she musically interjected, seeing she was excused.

'It 's true,' he said; and his own gravity then touched him to join a duet with her, which made them no longer feel strangers, and did the work of a month of intimacy. Better than sentiment, laughter opens the breast to love; opens the whole breast to his full quiver, instead of a corner here and there for a solitary arrow. Hail the occasion propitious, O British young! and laugh and treat love as an honest god, and dabble not with the sentimental rouge. These two laughed, and the souls of each cried out to other: 'It is I, it is I.'

They laughed and forgot the cause of their laughter, and the sun dried his light river clothing, and they strolled toward the blackbird's copse, and stood near a stile in sight of the foam of the weir and the many-coloured rings of eddies streaming forth from it.

Richard's boat, meanwhile, had contrived to shoot the weir, and was swinging, bottom upward, broadside with the current down the rapid backwater.

'Will you let it go?' said the damsel, eyeing it curiously.

'It can't be stopped,' he replied, and could have added: 'What do I care for it now?'

His old life was whirled away with it, dead, drowned. His new life was with her, alive, divine.

She flapped low the brim of her hat. 'You must really not come any farther,' she softly said.

'And will you go, and not tell me who you are?' he asked, growing bold as the fears of losing her came across him. 'And will you not tell me before you go'—his face burned—'how you came by that—that paper?'

She chose to select the easier question for answer: 'You ought to know me; we have been introduced.' Sweet was her winning off-hand affability.

'Then who, in heaven's name, are you? Tell me! I never could have forgotten you.'

'You have, I think,' she said.

'Impossible that we could ever have met, and I forget you!'

She looked up to him.

'Do you remember Belthorpe?'

'Belthorpe! Belthorpe!' quoth Richard, as if he had to touch his brain to recollect there was such a place. 'Do you mean old Blaize's farm?'

'Then I am old Blaize's niece.' She tripped him a soft curtsey.

The magnetized youth gazed at her. By what magic was it that this divine sweet creature could be allied with that old churl!

'Then what—what is your name?' said his mouth, while his eyes added: O wonderful creature! How came you to enrich the earth?'

'Have you forgot the Desboroughs of Dorset, too?' she peered at him from a side-bend of the flapping brim.

'The Desboroughs of Dorset?' A light broke in on him. 'And have you grown to this? That little girl I saw there!'

He drew close to her to read the nearest features of the vision. She could no more laugh off the piercing fervour of his eyes. Her volubility fluttered under his deeply wistful look, and now neither voice was high, and they were mutually constrained.

'You see,' she murmured, 'we are old acquaintances.'

Richard, with his eyes still intently fixed on her, returned: 'You are very beautiful!'

The words slipped out. Perfect simplicity is unconsciously audacious. Her overpowering beauty struck his heart, and, like an instrument that is touched and answers to the touch, he spoke.

Miss Desborough made an effort to trifle with this terrible directness; but his eyes would not be gainsaid, and checked her lips. She turned away from them, her bosom a little rebellious. Praise so passionately spoken, and by one who has been a damsel's first dream, dreamed of nightly many long nights, and clothed in the virgin silver of her thoughts in bud, praise from him is coin the heart cannot reject, if it would. She quickened her steps.

'I have offended you!' said a mortally wounded voice across her shoulder.

That he should think so were too dreadful.

'Oh, no, no! you would never offend me.' She gave him her whole sweet face.

'Then why—why do you leave me?'

'Because,' she hesitated, 'I must go.'

'No. You must not go. Why must you go? Do not go.'

'Indeed I must,' she said, pulling at the obnoxious broad brim of her hat; and, interpreting a pause he made for his assent to her rational resolve, shyly looking at him, she held her hand out, and said, 'Good-bye,' as if it were a natural thing to say.

The hand was pure white—white and fragrant as the frosted blossom of a May night. It was the hand whose shadow, cast before, he had last night bent his head reverentially above, and kissed—resigning himself thereupon over to execution for payment of the penalty of such daring—by such bliss well rewarded.

He took the hand, and held it, gazing between her eyes.

'Good-bye,' she said again, as frankly as she could, and at the same time slightly compressing her fingers on his in token of adieu. It was a signal for his to close firmly upon hers.

'You will not go?'

'Pray, let me,' she pleaded, her sweet brows suing in wrinkles.

'You will not go?' Mechanically he drew the white hand nearer his thumping heart.

'I must,' she faltered piteously.

'You will not go?'

'Oh, yes! yes!'

'Tell me. Do you wish to go?'

The question was a subtle one. A moment or two she did not answer, and then forswore herself, and said, 'Yes.'

'Do you—you wish to go?' He looked with quivering eyelids under hers.

A fainter 'Yes' responded.

'You wish—wish to leave me?' His breath went with the words.

'Indeed I must.'

Her hand became a closer prisoner.

All at once an alarming delicious shudder went through her frame. From him to her it coursed, and back from her to him. Forward and back love's electric messenger rushed from heart to heart, knocking at each, till it surged tumultuously against the bars of its prison, crying out for its mate. They stood trembling in unison, a lovely couple under these fair heavens of the morning.

When he could get his voice it said: 'Will you go?'

But she had none to reply with, and could only mutely bend upward her gentle wrist.

'Then, farewell!' he said, and, dropping his lips to the soft fair hand, kissed it, and hung his head, swinging away from her, ready for death.

Strange, that now she was released she should linger by him. Strange, that his audacity, instead of the executioner, brought blushes and timid tenderness to his side, and the sweet words: 'You are not angry with me?'

'With you, O beloved!' cried his soul. 'And you forgive me, fair charity!'

'I think it was rude of me to go without thanking you again,' she said, and again proffered her hand.

The sweet heaven-bird shivered out his song above him. The gracious glory of heaven fell upon his soul. He touched her hand, not moving his eyes from her, nor speaking, and she, with a soft word of farewell, passed across the stile, and up the pathway through the dewy shades of the copse, and out of the arch of the light, away from his eyes.

And away with her went the wild enchantment. He looked on barren air. But it was no more the world of yesterday. The marvellous splendours had sown seeds in him, ready to spring up and bloom at her gaze; and in his bosom now the vivid conjuration of her tones, her face, her shape, makes them leap and illumine him like fitful summer lightnings—ghosts of the vanished sun.

There was nothing to tell him that he had been making love and declaring it with extraordinary rapidity; nor did he know it. Soft flushed cheeks! sweet mouth! strange sweet brows! eyes of softest fire! how could his ripe eyes behold you, and not plead to keep you? Nay, how could he let you go? And he seriously asked himself that question.

To-morrow this place will have a memory—the river and the meadow, and the white falling weir: his heart will build a temple here; and the skylark will be its high-priest, and the old blackbird its glossy-gowned chorister, and there will be a sacred repast of dewberries. To-day the grass is grass: his heart is chased by phantoms and finds rest nowhere. Only when the most tender freshness of his flower comes across him does he taste a moment's calm; and no sooner does it come than it gives place to keen pangs of fear that she may not be his for ever.

Ere long he learns that her name is Lucy. Ere long he meets Ralph, and discovers that in a day he has distanced him by a sphere. He and Ralph and the curate of Lobourne join in their walks, and raise classical discussions on ladies' hair, fingering a thousand delicious locks, from those of Cleopatra to the Borgia's. 'Fair! fair! all of them fair!' sighs the melancholy curate, 'as are those women formed for our perdition! I think we have in this country what

will match the Italian or the Greek.' His mind flutters to Mrs. Doria, Richard blushes before the vision of Lucy, and Ralph, whose heroine's hair is a dark luxuriance, dissents, and claims a noble share in the slaughter of men for dark-haired wonders. They have no mutual confidences, but they are singularly kind to each other, these three children of instinct.

CHAPTER XVI

UNMASKING OF MASTER RIPTON THOMPSON

Lady Blandish, and others who professed an interest in the fortunes and future of the systematized youth, had occasionally mentioned names of families whose alliance, according to apparent calculations, would not degrade his blood: and over these names, secretly preserved on an open leaf of the note-book, Sir Austin, as he neared the metropolis, distantly dropped his eye. There were names historic and names mushroomic; names that the Conqueror might have called in his muster-roll; names that had been, clearly, tossed into the upper stratum of civilized life by a mill-wheel or a merchant-stool. Against them the baronet had written M. or Po., or Pr.—signifying Money, Position, Principles, favouring the latter with special brackets. The wisdom of a worldly man, which he could now and then adopt, determined him, before he commenced his round of visits, to consult and sound his solicitor and his physician thereanent; lawyers and doctors being the rats who know best the merits of a house, and on what sort of foundation it may be standing.

Sir Austin entered the great city with a sad mind. The memory of his misfortune came upon him vividly, as if no years had intervened, and it were but yesterday that he found the letter telling him that he had no wife and his son no mother. He wandered on foot through the streets the first night of his arrival, looking strangely at the shops and shows and bustle of the world from which he had divorced himself; feeling as destitute as the poorest vagrant. He had almost forgotten how to find his way about, and came across his old mansion in his efforts to regain his hotel. The windows were alight—signs of merry life within. He stared at it from the shadow of the opposite side. It seemed to him he was a ghost gazing upon his living past.

And then the phantom which had stood there mocking while he felt as other men—the phantom, now flesh and blood reality, seized and convulsed his heart, and filled its unforgiving crevices with bitter ironic venom. He remembered by the time reflection returned to him that it was Algernon, who had the house at his disposal, probably giving a card-party, or something of the sort. In the morning, too, he remembered that he had divorced the world to wed a System, and must be faithful to that exacting spouse, who, now alone of things on earth, could fortify and recompense him.

Mr. Thompson received his client with the dignity and emotion due to such a rent-roll and the unexpectedness of the honour. He was a thin stately man of law, garbed as one who gave audience to acred bishops, and carrying on his countenance the stamp of paternity to the parchment-skins, and of a virtuous attachment to port wine sufficient to increase his respectability in the eyes of moral Britain. After congratulating Sir Austin on the fortunate issue of two or three suits, and being assured that the baronet's business in town had no concern therewith, Mr. Thompson ventured to hope that the young heir was all his father could desire him to be, and heard with satisfaction that he was a pattern to the youth of the age.

'A difficult time of life, Sir Austin!' said the old lawyer, shaking his head. 'We must keep our eyes on them—keep awake! The mischief is done in a minute.'

'We must take care to have seen where we planted, and that the root was sound, or the mischief will do itself in spite of, or under the very spectacles of, supervision,' said the baronet.

His legal adviser murmured, 'Exactly,' as if that were his own idea, adding: 'It is my plan with Ripton, who has had the honour of an introduction to you, and a very pleasant time he spent with my young friend, whom he does not forget. Ripton follows the law. He is articled to me, and will, I trust, succeed me worthily in your confidence. I bring him into town in the morning; I take him back at night. I think I may say that I am quite content with him.'

'Do you think,' said Sir Austin, fixing his brows, 'that you can trace every act of his to its motive?'

The old lawyer bent forward and humbly requested that this might be repeated.

'Do you'—Sir Austin held the same searching expression—'do you establish yourself in a radiating centre of intuition: do you base your watchfulness on so thorough an acquaintance with his character, so perfect a knowledge of the instrument, that all its movements—even the eccentric ones—are anticipated by you, and provided for?'

The explanation was a little too long for the old lawyer to entreat another repetition. Winking with the painful deprecation of a deaf man, Mr. Thompson smiled urbanely, coughed conciliatingly, and said he was afraid he could not affirm that much, though he was happily enabled to say that Ripton had borne an extremely good character at school.

'I find,' Sir Austin remarked, as sardonically he relaxed his inspecting pose and mien, 'there are fathers who are content to be simply obeyed. Now I require not only that my son should obey; I would have him guiltless of the impulse to gainsay my wishes—feeling me in him stronger than his undeveloped nature, up to a certain period, where my responsibility ends and his commences. Man is a self-acting machine. He cannot cease to be a machine; but, though self-acting, he may lose the powers of self-guidance, and in a wrong course his very vitalities hurry him to perdition. Young, he is an organism ripening to the set mechanic diurnal round, and while so he needs all the angels to hold watch over him that he grow straight and healthy, and fit for what machinal duties he may have to perform.' . . .

Mr. Thompson agitated his eyebrows dreadfully. He was utterly lost. He respected Sir Austin's estates too much to believe for a moment he was listening to downright folly. Yet how otherwise explain the fact of his excellent client being incomprehensible to him? For a middle-aged gentleman, and one who has been in the habit of advising and managing, will rarely have a notion of accusing his understanding; and Mr. Thompson had not

the slightest notion of accusing his. But the baronet's condescension in coming thus to him, and speaking on the subject nearest his heart, might well affect him, and he quickly settled the case in favour of both parties, pronouncing mentally that his honoured client had a meaning, and so deep it was, so subtle, that no wonder he experienced difficulty in giving it fitly significant words.

Sir Austin elaborated his theory of the organism and the mechanism, for his lawyer's edification. At a recurrence of the word 'healthy' Mr. Thompson caught him up:

'I apprehend you! Oh, I agree with you, Sir Austin! entirely! Allow me to ring for my son Ripton. I think, if you condescend to examine him, you will say that regular habits, and a diet of nothing but law-reading—for other forms of literature I strictly interdict—have made him all that you instance.'

Mr. Thompson's hand was on the bell. Sir Austin arrested him.

'Permit me to see the lad at his occupation,' said he.

Our old friend Ripton sat in a room apart with the confidential clerk, Mr. Beazley, a veteran of law, now little better than a document, looking already signed and sealed, and shortly to be delivered, who enjoined nothing from his pupil and companion save absolute silence, and sounded his praises to his father at the close of days when it had been rigidly observed—not caring, or considering, the finished dry old document that he was, under what kind of spell a turbulent commonplace youth could be charmed into stillness for six hours of the day. Ripton was supposed to be devoted to the study of Blackstone. A tome of the classic legal commentator lay extended outside his desk, under the partially lifted lid of which nestled the assiduous student's head—law being thus brought into direct contact with his brain-pan. The office-door opened, and he heard not; his name was called, and he remained equally moveless. His method of taking in Blackstone seemed absorbing as it was novel.

'Comparing notes, I dare say,' whispered Mr. Thompson to Sir Austin. 'I call that study!'

The confidential clerk rose, and bowed obsequious senility.

'Is it like this every day, Beazley?' Mr. Thompson asked with parental pride.

'Ahem!' the old clerk replied, 'he is like this every day, sir. I could not ask more of a mouse.'

Sir Austin stepped forward to the desk. His proximity roused one of Ripton's senses, which blew a call to the others. Down went the lid of the desk. Dismay, and the ardours of study, flashed together in Ripton's face. He slouched from his perch with the air of one who means rather to defend his position than welcome a superior, the right hand in his waistcoat pocket fumbling a key, the left catching at his vacant stool.

Sir Austin put two fingers on the youth's shoulder, and said, leaning his head a little on one side, in a way habitual to him: 'I am glad to find my son's old comrade thus profitably occupied. I know what study is myself. But beware of prosecuting it too excitedly! Come! you must not be offended at our interruption; you will soon take up the thread again. Besides, you know, you must get accustomed to the visits of your client.'

So condescending and kindly did this speech sound to Mr. Thompson, that, seeing Ripton still preserve his appearance of disorder and sneaking defiance, he thought fit to nod and frown at the youth, and desired him to inform the baronet what particular part of Blackstone he was absorbed in mastering at that moment.

Ripton hesitated an instant, and blundered out, with dubious articulation, 'The Law of Gravelkind.'

'What law?' said Sir Austin, perplexed.

'Gravelkind,' again rumbled Ripton's voice.

Sir Austin turned to Mr. Thompson for an explanation. The old lawyer was shaking his law-box.

'Singular!' he exclaimed. 'He will make that mistake! What law, sir?'

Ripton read his error in the sternly painful expression of his father's face, and corrected himself. 'Gavelkind, sir.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Thompson, with a sigh of relief. 'Gravelkind, indeed! Gavelkind! An old Kentish——' He was

going to expound, but Sir Austin assured him he knew it, and a very absurd law it was, adding: 'I should like to look at your son's notes, or remarks on the judiciousness of that family arrangement, if he has any.'

'You were making notes, or referring to them, as we entered,' said Mr. Thompson to the sucking lawyer; 'a very good plan, which I have always enjoined on you. Were you not?'

Ripton stammered that he was afraid he had not any notes to show, worth seeing.

'What were you doing then, sir?'

'Making notes,' muttered Ripton, looking incarnate subterfuge.

'Exhibit!'

Ripton glanced at his desk and then at his father; at Sir Austin, and at the confidential clerk. He took out his key. It would not fit the hole.

'Exhibit!' was peremptorily called again.

In his praiseworthy efforts to accommodate the key-hole, Ripton discovered that the desk was already unlocked. Mr. Thompson marched to it, and held the lid aloft. A book was lying open within, which Ripton immediately hustled among a mass of papers and tossed into a dark corner, not before the glimpse of a coloured frontispiece was caught by Sir Austin's eye.

The baronet smiled, and said: 'You study heraldry, too? Are you fond of the science?'

Ripton replied that he was very fond of it—extremely attached, and threw a further pile of papers into the dark corner.

The notes had been less conspicuously placed, and the search for them was tedious and vain. Papers, not legal, or the fruits of study, were found, that made Mr. Thompson more intimate with the condition of his son's exchequer; nothing in the shape of a remark on the Law of Gavelkind.

Mr. Thompson suggested to his son that they might be among those scraps he had thrown carelessly into the dark corner. Ripton, though he consented to inspect them, was positive they were not there.

'What have we here?' said Mr. Thompson, seizing a

neatly folded paper addressed to the editor of a law publication, as Ripton brought them forth, one by one. Forthwith Mr. Thompson fixed his spectacles and read aloud:

'To the Editor of the "Jurist."

'Sir,—In your recent observations on the great case of Crim——'

Mr. Thompson hem'd! and stopped short, like a man who comes unexpectedly upon a snake in his path. Mr. Beazley's feet shuffled. Sir Austin changed the position of an arm.

'It 's on the other side, I think,' gasped Ripton.

Mr. Thompson confidently turned over, and intoned with emphasis:

'To Absalom, the son of David, the little Jew usurer of Bond Court, Whitecross Gutters, for his introduction to Venus, I O U five pounds, when I can pay.

'Signed: RIPTON THOMPSON.'

Underneath this fictitious legal instrument was discreetly appended:

'(Mem. Document not binding.)'

There was a pause: an awful under-breath of sanctified wonderment and reproach passed round the office. Sir Austin assumed an attitude. Mr. Thompson shed a glance of severity on his confidential clerk, who parried by throwing up his hands.

Ripton, now fairly bewildered, stuffed another paper under his father's nose, hoping the outside perhaps would satisfy him: it was marked 'Legal Considerations.' Mr. Thompson had no idea of sparing or shielding his son. In fact, like many men whose self-love is wounded by their offspring, he felt vindictive, and was ready to sacrifice him up to a certain point, for the good of both. He therefore opened the paper, expecting something worse than what he had hitherto seen, despite its formal heading, and he was not disappointed.

The 'Legal Considerations' related to the case regarding

which Ripton had conceived it imperative upon him to address a letter to the editor of the *Jurist*, and was indeed a great case, and an ancient; revived apparently for the special purpose of displaying the forensic abilities of the junior counsel for the plaintiff, Mr. Ripton Thompson, whose assistance the Attorney-General, in his opening statement, congratulated himself on securing; a rather unusual thing, due probably to the eminence and renown of that youthful gentleman at the Bar of his country. So much was seen from the copy of a report purporting to be extracted from a newspaper, and prefixed to the junior counsel's remarks, or legal considerations, on the conduct of the case, the admissibility and non-admissibility of certain evidence, and the ultimate decision of the judges.

Mr. Thompson, senior, lifted the paper high, with the spirit of one prepared to do execution on the criminal, and in the voice of a town-crier, varied by a bitter accentuation with satiric sing-song tone, deliberately read:

'VULCAN *v.* MARS.

'The Attorney-General, assisted by Mr. Ripton Thompson, appeared on behalf of the plaintiff. Mr. Serjeant Cupid, Q.C., and Mr. Capital Opportunity, for the defendant.'

'Oh!' snapped Mr. Thompson, senior, peering venom at the unfortunate Ripton over his spectacles, 'your notes are on that issue, sir! Thus you employ your time, sir!'

With another side-shot at the confidential clerk, who retired immediately behind a strong entrenchment of shrugs, Mr. Thompson was pushed by the devil of his rancour to continue reading:

'This case is too well known to require more than a partial summary of particulars. . . .'

'Ahem! we will skip the particulars, however partial,' said Mr. Thompson. 'Ah!—what do you mean here, sir—but enough! I think we may be excused your legal considerations on such a case. This is how you employ your law studies, sir! You put them to this purpose? Mr.

Beazley! you will henceforward sit alone. I must have this young man under my own eye. Sir Austin! permit me to apologize to you for subjecting you to a scene so disagreeable. It was a father's duty not to spare him.'

Mr. Thompson wiped his forehead, as Brutus might have done after passing judgment on the scion of his house.

'These papers,' he went on, fluttering Ripton's precious lucubrations in a waving judicial hand, 'I shall retain. The day will come when he will regard them with shame. And it shall be his penance, his punishment, to do so! Stop!' he cried, as Ripton was noiselessly shutting his desk, 'have you more of them, sir; of a similar description? Rout them out! Let us know you at your worst. What have you there—in that corner?'

Ripton was understood to say he devoted that corner to old briefs on important cases.

Mr. Thompson thrust his trembling fingers among the old briefs, and turned over the volume Sir Austin had observed, but without much remarking it, for his suspicions had not risen to print.

'A manual of heraldry?' the baronet politely, and it may be ironically, inquired, before it could well escape.

'I like it very much,' said Ripton, clutching the book in dreadful torment.

'Allow me to see that you have our arms and crest correct.' The baronet proffered a hand for the book.

'A griffin between two wheatsheaves,' cried Ripton, still clutching it nervously.

Mr. Thompson, without any notion of what he was doing, drew the book from Ripton's hold; whereupon the two seniors laid their grey heads together over the title-page. It set forth in attractive characters beside a coloured frontispiece, which embodied the promise displayed there, the entrancing adventures of Miss Random, a strange young lady.

Had there been a Black Hole within the area of those law regions to consign Ripton to there and then, or an iron rod handy to mortify his sinful flesh, Mr. Thompson would have used them. As it was, he contented himself by looking black holes and iron rods at the detected youth,

who sat on his perch insensible to what might happen next, collapsed.

Mr. Thompson cast the wicked creature down with a 'Pah!' He, however, took her up again, and strode away with her. Sir Austin gave Ripton a forefinger, and kindly touched his head, saying: 'Good-bye, boy! At some future date Richard will be happy to see you at Raynham.'

Undoubtedly this was a great triumph to the System!

CHAPTER XVII

GOOD WINE AND GOOD BLOOD

THE conversation between solicitor and client was resumed.

'Is it possible,' quoth Mr. Thompson, the moment he had ushered his client into his private room, 'that you will consent, Sir Austin, to see him and receive him again?'

'Certainly,' the baronet replied. 'Why not? This by no means astonishes me. When there is no longer danger to my son he will be welcome as he was before. He is a schoolboy. I knew it. I expected it. The results of your principle, Thompson!'

'One of the very worst books of that abominable class!' exclaimed the old lawyer, opening at the coloured frontispiece, from which brazen Miss Random smiled bewitchingly out, as if she had no doubt of captivating Time and all his veterans on a fair field. 'Pah!' he shut her to with the energy he would have given to the office of publicly slapping her face; 'from this day I diet him on bread and water—rescind his pocket-money! How he could have got hold of such a book? How he—! And what ideas! Concealing them from me as he has done so cunningly! He trifles with vice! His mind is in a putrid state! I might have believed—I did believe—I might have gone on believing—my son Ripton to be a moral young man!' The old lawyer interjected on the delusion of fathers, and sat down in a lamentable abstraction.

'The lad has come out!' said Sir Austin. 'His adoption of the legal form is amusing. He trifles with vice, true: people newly initiated are as hardy as its intimates, and a young sinner's amusements will resemble those of a confirmed debauchee. The satiated, and the insatiate, appetite alike appeal to extremes. You are astonished at this revelation of your son's condition. I expected it; though assuredly, believe me, not this sudden and indisputable proof of it. But I knew that the seed was in him,

and therefore I have not latterly invited him to Raynham. School, and the corruption there, will bear its fruits sooner or later. I could advise you, Thompson, what to do with him: it would be my plan.'

Mr. Thompson murmured, like a true courtier, that he should esteem it an honour to be favoured with Sir Austin Feverel's advice: secretly resolute, like a true Briton, to follow his own.

'Let him, then,' continued the baronet, 'see vice in its nakedness. While he has yet some innocence, nauseate him! Vice, taken little by little, usurps gradually the whole creature. My counsel to you, Thompson, would be, to drag him through the sinks of town.'

Mr. Thompson began to blink again.

'Oh, I shall punish him, Sir Austin! Do not fear me, sir. I have no tenderness for vice.'

'That is not what is wanted, Thompson. You mistake me. He should be dealt with gently. Heavens! do you hope to make him hate vice by making him a martyr for its sake? You must descend from the pedestal of age to become his mentor: cause him to see how certainly and pitilessly vice itself punishes: accompany him into its haunts——'

'Over town?' broke forth Mr. Thompson.

'Over town,' said the baronet.

'And depend upon it,' he added, 'that, until fathers act thoroughly up to their duty, we shall see the sights we see in great cities, and hear the tales we hear in little villages, with death and calamity in our homes, and a legacy of sorrow and shame to the generations to come. I do aver,' he exclaimed, becoming excited, 'that, if it were not for the duty to my son, and the hope I cherish in him, I, seeing the accumulation of misery we are handing down to an innocent posterity—to whom, through our sin, the fresh breath of life will be foul—I—yes! I would hide my name! For whither are we tending? What home is pure absolutely? What cannot our doctors and lawyers tell us?'

Mr. Thompson acquiesced significantly.

'And what is to come of this?' Sir Austin continued.

'When the sins of the fathers are multiplied by the sons, is not perdition the final sum of things? And is not life, the boon of heaven, growing to be the devil's game utterly? But for my son, I would hide my name. I would not bequeath it to be cursed by them that walk above my grave!'

This was indeed a terrible view of existence. Mr. Thompson felt uneasy. There was a dignity in his client, an impressiveness in his speech, that silenced remonstrating reason and the cry of long years of comfortable respectability. Mr. Thompson went to church regularly; paid his rates and dues without overmuch, or at least more than common, grumbling. On the surface he was a good citizen, fond of his children, faithful to his wife, devoutly marching to a fair seat in heaven on a path paved by something better than a thousand a year. But here was a man sighting him from below the surface, and though it was an unfair, unaccustomed, not to say un-English, method of regarding one's fellow-man, Mr. Thompson was troubled by it. What though his client exaggerated? Facts were at the bottom of what he said. And he was acute—he had unmasked Ripton! Since Ripton's exposure he winced at a personal application in the text his client preached from. Possibly this was the secret source of part of his anger against that peccant youth.

Mr. Thompson shook his head, and, with dolefully puckered visage and a pitiable contraction of his shoulders, rose slowly up from his chair. Apparently he was about to speak, but he straightway turned and went meditatively to a side-recess in the room, whereof he opened a door, drew forth a tray and a decanter labelled PORT, filled a glass for his client, deferentially invited him to partake of it; filled another glass for himself, and drank.

That was his reply.

Sir Austin never took wine before dinner. Thompson had looked as if he meant to speak: he waited for Thompson's words.

Mr. Thompson saw that, as his client did not join him in his glass, the eloquence of that porty reply was lost on his client.

Having slowly ingurgitated and meditated upon this precious draught, and turned its flavour over and over with an aspect of potent judicial wisdom (one might have thought that he was weighing mankind in the balance), the old lawyer heaved, and said, sharpening his lips over the admirable vintage: 'The world is in a very sad state, I fear, Sir Austin!'

His client gazed at him queerly.

'But that,' Mr. Thompson added immediately, ill-concealing by his gaze the glowing intestinal congratulations going on within him, 'that is, I think you would say, Sir Austin—if I could but prevail upon you—a tolerably good character wine!'

'There 's virtue somewhere, I see, Thompson!' Sir Austin murmured, without disturbing his legal adviser's dimples.

The old lawyer sat down to finish his glass, saying that such a wine was not to be had everywhere.

They were then outwardly silent for a space. Inwardly one of them was full of riot and jubilant uproar: as if the solemn fields of law were suddenly to be invaded and possessed by troops of Bacchanals: and to preserve a decently wretched physiognomy over it, and keep on terms with his companion, he had to grimace like a melancholy clown in a pantomime.

Mr. Thompson brushed back his hair. The baronet was still expectant. Mr. Thompson sighed deeply, and emptied his glass. He combated the change that had come over him. He tried not to see ruby. He tried to feel miserable, and it was not in him. He spoke, drawing what appropriate inspirations he could from his client's countenance, to show that they had views in common: 'Degenerating sadly, I fear!'

The baronet nodded.

'According to what my wine-merchants say,' continued Mr. Thompson, 'there can be no doubt about it.'

Sir Austin stared.

'It 's the grape, or the ground, or something,' Mr. Thompson went on. 'All I can say is, our youngsters will have a bad look-out! In my opinion Government should

be compelled to send out a commission to inquire into the cause. To Englishmen it would be a public calamity. It surprises me—I hear men sit and talk despondently of this extraordinary disease of the vine, and not one of them seems to think it incumbent on him to act, and do his best to stop it.' He fronted his client like a man who accuses an enormous public delinquency. 'Nobody makes a stir! The apathy of Englishmen will become proverbial. Pray try it, Sir Austin! Pray allow me. Such a wine cannot disagree at any dinner. Do! I am allowanced two glasses three hours before dinner. Stomachic. I find it agree with me surprisingly: quite a new man. I suppose it will last our time. It must! What should we do? There 's no law possible without it. Not a lawyer of us could live. Ours is an occupation which dries the blood.'

The scene with Ripton had unnerved him, the wine had renovated, and gratitude to the wine inspired his tongue. He thought that his respected client, of the whimsical mind, though undoubtedly correct moral views, had need of a glass.

'Now that very wine—Sir Austin—I think I do not err in saying, that very wine your respected father, Sir Pylcher Feverel, used to taste whenever he came to consult my father, when I was a boy. And I remember one day being called in, and Sir Pylcher himself poured me out a glass. I wish I could call in Ripton now, and do the same. No! Leniency in such a case as that! The wine would not hurt him—I doubt if there be much left for him to welcome his guests with. Ha! ha! Now if I could persuade you, Sir Austin, as you do not take wine before dinner, some day to favour me with your company at my little country cottage—I have a wine there—the fellow to that—I think you would, I do think you would'—Mr Thompson meant to say, he thought his client would arrive at something of a similar jocund contemplation of his fellows in their degeneracy that inspirited lawyers after potation, but condensed the sensual promise into 'highly approve.'

Sir Austin speculated on his legal adviser with a sour mouth comically compressed.

It stood clear to him that Thompson before his port, and Thompson after, were two different men. To indoctrinate him now was too late: it was perhaps the time to make the positive use of him he wanted.

He pencilled on a handy slip of paper: 'Two prongs of a fork; the world stuck between them—port and the palate: 'Tis one which fails first—down goes the world'; and again the hieroglyph—'port-spectacles.' He said: 'I shall gladly accompany you this evening, Thompson,' words that transfigured the delighted lawyer, and consigned the skeleton of a great aphorism to his pocket, there to gather flesh and form, with numberless others in a like condition.

'I came to visit my lawyer,' he said to himself. 'I think I have been dealing with the world in epitome!'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SYSTEM ENCOUNTERS THE WILD OATS SPECIAL PLEA

THE rumour circulated that Sir Austin Feverel, the recluse of Raynham, the rank misogynist, the rich baronet, was in town, looking out for a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir. Doctor Benjamin Bairam was the excellent authority. Doctor Bairam had safely delivered Mrs. Deborah Gossip of this interesting bantling, which was forthwith dandled in dozens of feminine laps. Doctor Bairam could boast the first interview with the famous recluse. He had it from his own lips that the object of the baronet was to look out a bride for his only son and uncorrupted heir; 'and,' added the doctor, 'she 'll be lucky who gets him.' Which was interpreted to mean that he would be a catch; the doctor probably intending to allude to certain extraordinary difficulties in the way of a choice.

A demand was made on the publisher of *The Pilgrim's Scrip* for all his outstanding copies. Conventionalities were defied. A summer-shower of cards fell on the baronet's table.

He had few male friends. He shunned the clubs as nests of scandal. The cards he contemplated were mostly those of the sex, with the husband, if there was a husband, evidently dragged in for propriety's sake. He perused the cards and smiled. He knew their purpose. What terrible light Thompson and Bairam had thrown on some of them! Heavens! in what a state was the blood of this empire.

Before commencing his campaign he called on two ancient intimates, Lord Heddon and his distant cousin Darley Absworthy, both Members of Parliament, useful men, though gouty, who had sown in their time a fine crop of wild oats, and advocated the advantage of doing so,

seeing that they did not fancy themselves the worse for it. He found one with an imbecile son and the other with consumptive daughters. 'So much,' he wrote in the note-book, 'for the wild oats theory!'

Darley was proud of his daughters' white and pink skins. 'Beautiful complexions,' he called them. The eldest was in the market, immensely admired. Sir Austin was introduced to her. She talked fluently and sweetly. A youth not on his guard, a simple schoolboy youth, or even a man, might have fallen in love with her, she was so affable and fair. There was something poetic about her. And she was quite well, she said, the baronet frequently questioning her on that point. She intimated that she was robust; but towards the close of their conversation her hand would now and then travel to her side, and she breathed painfully an instant, saying: 'Isn't it odd? Dora, Adela, and myself, we all feel the same queer sensation—about the heart, I think it is—after talking much.'

Sir Austin nodded and blinked sadly, exclaiming to his soul: 'Wild oats! wild oats!'

He did not ask permission to see Dora and Adela.

Lord Heddon vehemently preached wild oats.

'It 's all nonsense, Feverel,' he said, 'about bringing up a lad out of the common way. He 's all the better for a little racketing when he 's green—feels his bone and muscle—learns to know the world. He 'll never be a man if he hasn't played at the old game one time in his life, and the earlier the better. I 've always found the best fellows were wildish once. I don't care what he does when he 's a greenhorn; besides, he 's got an excuse for it then. You can't expect to have a man, if he doesn't take a man's food. You 'll have a milksop. And, depend upon it, when he does break out he 'll go to the devil, and nobody pities him. Look what those fellows, the grocers, do when they get hold of a young — what d' ye call 'em — apprentice. They know the scoundrel was born with a sweet tooth. Well! they give him the run of the shop, and in a very short time he soberly deals out the goods, a devilish deal too wise to abstract a morsel even for the pleasure of stealing. I know you have contrary theories.

You hold that the young grocer should have a soul above sugar. It won't do! Take my word for it, Feverel, it 's a dangerous experiment, that of bringing up flesh and blood in harness. No colt will bear it, or he 's a tame beast. And look you: take it on medical grounds. Early excesses the frame will recover from: late ones break the constitution. There 's the case in a nutshell. How 's your son?'

'Sound and well!' replied Sir Austin. 'And yours?'

'Oh, Lipscombe 's always the same!' Lord Heddon sighed peevishly. 'He 's quiet—that 's one good thing; but there 's no getting the country to take him, so I must give up hopes of that.'

Lord Lipscombe entering the room just then, Sir Austin surveyed him, and was not astonished at the refusal of the country to take him.

'Wild oats!' he thought, as he contemplated the headless, degenerate, weedy issue and result.

Both Darley Absworthy and Lord Heddon spoke of the marriage of their offspring as a matter of course. 'And if I were not a coward,' Sir Austin confessed to himself, 'I should stand forth and forbid the banns! This universal ignorance of the inevitable consequence of sin is frightful! The wild oats plea is a torpedo that seems to have struck the world, and rendered it morally insensible.' However, they silenced him. He was obliged to spare their feelings on a subject to him so deeply sacred. The healthful image of his noble boy rose before him, a triumphant living rejoinder to any hostile argument.

He was content to remark to his doctor that he thought the third generation of wild oats would be a pretty thin crop!

Families against whom neither Thompson lawyer nor Bairam physician could recollect a progenitorial blot, either on the male or female side, were not numerous. 'Only,' said the doctor, 'you really must not be too exacting in these days, my dear Sir Austin. It is impossible to contest your principle, and you are doing mankind incalculable service in calling its attention to this the gravest of its duties: but as the stream of civilization

progresses we must be a little taken in the lump, as it were. The world is, I can assure you—and I do not look only above the surface, you can believe—the world is awakening to the vital importance of the question.'

'Doctor,' replied Sir Austin, 'if you had a pure-blood Arab barb would you cross him with a screw?'

'Decidedly not,' said the doctor.

'Then permit me to say, I shall employ every care to match my son according to his merits,' Sir Austin returned. 'I trust the world is awakening, as you observe. I have been to my publisher, since my arrival in town, with a manuscript *Proposal for a New System of Education of our British Youth*, which may come in opportunely. I think I am entitled to speak on that subject.'

'Certainly,' said the doctor. 'You will admit, Sir Austin, that, compared with continental nations—our neighbours, for instance — we shine to advantage, in morals as in everything else. I hope you admit that?'

'I find no consolation in shining by comparison with a lower standard,' said the baronet. 'If I compare the enlightenment of your views—for you admit my principle —with the obstinate incredulity of a country doctor's, who sees nothing of the world, you are hardly flattered, I presume?'

Doctor Bairam would hardly be flattered at such a comparison, assuredly, he interjected.

'Besides,' added the baronet, 'the French make no pretences, and thereby escape one of the main penalties of hypocrisy. Whereas we—but I am not their advocate, credit me. It is better, perhaps, to pay our homage to virtue. At least it delays the spread of entire corruptness.'

Doctor Bairam wished the baronet success, and diligently endeavoured to assist his search for a mate worthy of the pure-blood barb, by putting several mammas, whom he visited, on the alert.

CHAPTER XIX

A DIVERSION PLAYED ON A PENNY WHISTLE

AWAY with systems! Away with a corrupt world! Let us breathe the air of the enchanted island.

Golden lie the meadows: golden run the streams; red gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth, and walks the fields and the waters.

The sun is coming down to earth, and the fields and the waters shout to him golden shouts. He comes, and his heralds run before him, and touch the leaves of oaks and planes and beeches lucid green, and the pine-stems redder gold; leaving brightest footprints upon thickly-weeded banks, where the foxglove's last upper-bells incline, and bramble-shoots wander amid moist rich herbage. The plumes of the woodland are alight; and beyond them, over the open, 'tis a race with the long-thrown shadows; a race across the heaths and up the hills, till, at the farthest bourne of mounted eastern cloud, the heralds of the sun lay rosy fingers and rest.

Sweet are the shy recesses of the woodland. The ray treads softly there. A film athwart the pathway quivers many-hued against purple shade fragrant with warm pines, deep moss-beds, feathery ferns. The little brown squirrel drops tail, and leaps; the inmost bird is startled to a chance tuneless note. From silence into silence things move.

Peeps of the revelling splendour above and around enliven the conscious full heart within. The flaming west, the crimson heights, shower their glories through voluminous leafage. But these are bowers where deep bliss dwells, imperial joy, that owes no fealty to yonder glories, in which the young lamb gambols and the spirits of men are glad. Descend, great Radiance! embrace creation with beneficent fire, and pass from us! You and the vice-regal light that succeeds to you, and all heavenly

pageants, are the ministers and the slaves of the throbbing content within.

For this is the home of the enchantment. Here, secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet: here like darkling nightingales they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls.

Roll on, grinding wheels of the world: cries of ships going down in a calm, groans of a system which will not know its rightful hour of exultation, complain to the universe. You are not heard here.

He calls her by her name, Lucy: and she, blushing at her great boldness, has called him by his, Richard. Those two names are the key-notes of the wonderful harmonies the angels sing aloft.

'Lucy, my beloved!'

'Oh, Richard!'

Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, a sheep-boy pipes to meditative eve on a penny whistle.

Love's musical instrument is as old, and as poor: it has but two stops; and yet, you see, the cunning musician does thus much with it!

Other speech they have little; light foam playing upon waves of feeling, and of feeling compact, that bursts only when the sweeping volume is too wild, and is no more than their sigh of tenderness spoken.

Perhaps Love played his tune so well because their natures had unblunted edges, and were keen for bliss, confiding in it as natural food. To gentlemen and ladies he fine-draws upon the viol, ravishingly; or blows into the mellow bassoon; or rouses the heroic ardours of the trumpet; or, it may be, commands the whole orchestra for them. And they are pleased. He is still the cunning musician. They languish, and taste ecstasy: but it is, however sonorous, an earthly concert. For them the spheres move not to two notes. They have lost, or forfeited and never known, the first supersensual spring of the ripe senses into passion; when they carry the soul with them, and have the privileges of spirits to walk disembodied, boundlessly to feel. Or one has it, and the

other is a dead body. Ambrosia let them eat, and drink the nectar: here sit a couple to whom Love's simple bread and water is a finer feast.

Pipe, happy sheep-boy, Love! Irradiated angels, unfold your wings and lift your voices!

They have outflown philosophy. Their instinct has shot beyond the ken of science. They were made for their Eden.

'And this divine gift was in store for me!'

So runs the internal outcry of each, clasping each: it is their recurring refrain to the harmonies. How it illumined the years gone by and suffused the living future!

'You for me: I for you!'

'We are born for each other!'

They believe that the angels have been busy about them from their cradles. The celestial hosts have worthily striven to bring them together. And, O victory! O wonder! after toil and pain, and difficulties exceeding, the celestial hosts have succeeded!

'Here we two sit who are written above as one!'

Pipe, happy Love! pipe on to these dear innocents!

The tide of colour has ebbed from the upper sky. In the west the sea of sunken fire draws back; and the stars leap forth and tremble, and retire before the advancing moon, who slips the silver train of cloud from her shoulders, and, with her foot upon the pine-tops, surveys heaven.

'Lucy, did you never dream of meeting me?'

'Oh, Richard! yes; for I remembered you.'

'Lucy! and did you pray that we might meet?'

'I did!'

Young as when she looked upon the lovers in Paradise, the fair Immortal journeys onward. Fronting her, it is not night but veiled day. Full half the sky is flushed. Not darkness, not day, but the nuptials of the two.

'My own! my own for ever! You are pledged to me? Whisper!'

He hears the delicious music.

'And you are mine?'

A soft beam travels to the fern-covert under the pine-wood where they sit, and for answer he has her eyes:

turned to him an instant, timidly fluttering over the depths of his, and then downcast; for through her eyes her soul is naked to him.

'Lucy! my bride! my life!'

The night-jar spins his dark monotony on the branch of the pine. The soft beam travels round them, and listens to their hearts. Their lips are locked.

Pipe no more, Love, for a time! Pipe as you will you cannot express their first kiss; nothing of its sweetness, and of the sacredness of it nothing. St. Cecilia up aloft, before the silver organ-pipes of Paradise, pressing fingers upon all the notes of which love is but one, from her you may hear it.

So Love is silent. Out in the world there, on the skirts of the woodland, the self-satisfied sheep-boy delivers a last complacent squint down the length of his penny whistle, and, with a flourish correspondingly awry, he also marches into silence, hailed by supper. The woods are still. There is heard but the night-jar spinning on the pine-branch, circled by moonlight.

CHAPTER XX

CELEBRATES THE TIME-HONOURED TREATMENT OF A DRAGON BY THE HERO

ENCHANTED islands have not yet rooted out their old brood of dragons. Wherever there is romance, these monsters come by inimical attraction. Because the heavens are certainly propitious to true lovers, the beasts of the abysses are banded to destroy them, stimulated by innumerable sad victories; and every love-tale is an epic war of the upper and lower powers. I wish good fairies were a little more active. They seem to be cajoled into security by the happiness of their favourites; whereas the wicked are always alert, and circumspect. They let the little ones shut their eyes to fancy they are not seen, and then commence.

These appointments and meetings, involving a start from the dinner-table at the hour of contemplative digestion and prime claret; the hour when the wise youth Adrian delighted to talk at his ease—to recline in dreamy consciousness that a work of good was going on inside him; these abstractions from his studies, excesses of gaiety and glumness, heavings of the chest, and other odd signs, but mainly the disgusting behaviour of his pupil at the dinner-table, taught Adrian to understand, though the young gentleman was clever in excuses, that he had somehow learnt there was another half to the divided apple of creation, and had embarked upon the great voyage of discovery of the difference between the two halves. With his usual coolness Adrian debated whether he might be in the observatory or the practical stage of the voyage. For himself, as a man and a philosopher, Adrian had no objection to its being either; and he had only to consider which was temporarily most threatening to the ridiculous system he had to support. Richard's absence annoyed

him. The youth was vivacious, and his enthusiasm good fun; and besides, when he left table, Adrian had to sit alone with Hippias and the Eighteenth Century, from both of whom he had extracted all the amusement that could be got, and he saw his digestion menaced by the society of two ruined stomachs, who bored him just when he loved himself most. Poor Hippias was now so reduced that he had profoundly to calculate whether a particular dish, or an extra glass of wine, would have a bitter effect on him and be felt through the remainder of his years. He was in the habit of uttering his calculations half aloud, wherein the prophetic doubts of experience, and the succulent insinuations of appetite, contended hotly. It was horrible to hear him, so let us pardon Adrian for tempting him to a decision in favour of the moment.

'Happy to take wine with you,' Adrian would say, and Hippias would regard the decanter with a pained forehead, and put up the doctor.

'Drink, Nephew Hippy, and think of the doctor to-morrow!' the Eighteenth Century cheerily ruffles her cap at him, and recommends her own practice.

'It 's this literary work!' interjects Hippias, handling his glass of remorse. 'I don't know what else it can be. You have no idea how anxious I feel. I have frightful dreams. I 'm perpetually anxious.'

'No wonder,' says Adrian, who enjoys the childish simplicity to which an absorbed study of his sensational existence has brought poor Hippias. 'No wonder. Ten years of fairy mythology! Could any one hope to sleep in peace after that? As to your digestion, no one has a digestion who is in the doctor's hands. They prescribe from dogmas, and don't count on the system. They have cut you down from two bottles to two glasses. It 's absurd. You can't sleep, because your system is crying out for what it 's accustomed to.'

Hippias sips his Madeira with a niggardly confidence, but assures Adrian that he really should not like to venture on a bottle now: it would be rank madness to venture on a bottle now, he thinks. Last night only, after partaking, under protest, of that rich French dish, or was it the duck?

—Adrian advised him to throw the blame on that vulgar bird.—Say the duck, then. Last night, he was no sooner stretched in bed, than he seemed to be of an enormous size: all his limbs—his nose, his mouth, his toes—were elephantine! An elephant was a pigmy to him. And his hugeness seemed to increase the instant he shut his eyes. He turned on this side; he turned on that. He lay on his back; he tried putting his face to the pillow; and he continued to swell. He wondered the room could hold him—he thought he must burst it—and absolutely lit a candle, and went to the looking-glass to see whether he was bearable.

By this time Adrian and Richard were laughing uncontrollably. He had, however, a genial auditor in the Eighteenth Century, who declared it to be a new disease, not known in her day, and deserving investigation. She was happy to compare sensations with him, but hers were not of the complex order, and a potion soon righted her. In fact, her system appeared to be a debatable ground for aliment and medicine, on which the battle was fought, and, when over, she was none the worse, as she joyfully told Hippias. Never looked ploughman on prince, or village belle on court beauty, with half the envy poor nineteenth-century Hippias expended in his gaze on the Eighteenth. He was too serious to note much the laughter of the young men.

This 'tragedy of a cooking-apparatus,' as Adrian designated the malady of Hippias, was repeated regularly every evening. It was natural for any youth to escape as quick as he could from such a table of stomachs.

Adrian bore with his conduct considerately, until a letter from the baronet, describing the house and maternal system of a Mrs. Caroline Grandison, and the rough grain of hopefulness in her youngest daughter, spurred him to think of his duties, and see what was going on. He gave Richard half an hour's start, and then put on his hat to follow his own keen scent, leaving Hippias and the Eighteenth Century to piquet.

In the lane near Belthorpe he met a maid of the farm not unknown to him, one Molly Davenport by name, a

buxom lass, who, on seeing him, invoked her Good Gracious, the generic maid's familiar, and was instructed by reminiscences vivid, if ancient, to giggle.

'Are you looking for your young gentleman?' Molly presently asked.

Adrian glanced about the lane like a cool brigand, to see if the coast was clear, and replied to her: 'I am, miss. I want you to tell me about him.'

'Dear!' said the buxom lass, 'was you coming for me to-night to know?'

Adrian rebuked her: for her bad grammar, apparently.

''Cause I can't stop out long to-night,' Molly explained, taking the rebuke to refer altogether to her bad grammar.

'You may go in when you please, miss. Is that any one coming? Come here in the shade.'

'Now, get along!' said Miss Molly.

Adrian spoke with resolution. 'Listen to me, Molly Davenport!' He put a coin in her hand, which had a medical effect in calming her to attention. 'I want to know whether you have seen him at all?'

'Who? Your young gentleman? I sh'd think I did. I seen him to-night only. Ain't he growed handsome? He 's al'ays about Beltharp now. It ain't to fire no more ricks. He 's afire 'unself. Ain't you seen 'em together? He 's after the missis——'

Adrian requested Miss Davenport to be respectful, and confine herself to particulars. This buxom lass then told him that her young missis and Adrian's young gentleman were a pretty couple, and met one another every night. The girl swore for their innocence.

'As for Miss Lucy, she haven't a bit of art in her, nor have he.'

'They 're all nature, I suppose,' said Adrian. 'How is it I don't see her at church?'

'She 's Catholic, or somethink,' said Molly. 'Her feyther was, and a leftenant. She 've a cross in her bedroom. She don't go to church. I see you there last Sunday a-lookin' so solemn,' and Molly stroked her hand down her chin to give it length.

Adrian insisted on her keeping to facts. It was dark,

and in the dark he was indifferent to the striking contrasts suggested by the lass, but he wanted to hear facts, and he again bribed her to impart nothing but facts. Upon which she told him further, that her young lady was an innocent artless creature who had been to school upwards of three years with the nuns, and had a little money of her own, and was beautiful enough to be a lord's lady, and had been in love with Master Richard ever since she was a little girl. Molly had got from a friend of hers up at the abbey, Mary Garner, the housemaid who cleaned Master Richard's room, a bit of paper once with the young gentleman's handwriting, and had given it to her Miss Lucy, and Miss Lucy had given her a gold sovereign for it—just for his handwriting! Miss Lucy did not seem happy at the farm, because of that young Tom, who was always leering at her, and to be sure she was quite a lady, and could play, and sing, and dress with the best.

'She looks like angels in her nightgown!' Molly wound up.

The next moment she ran up close, and speaking for the first time as if there were a distinction of position between them, petitioned: 'Mr Harley! you won't go for doin' any harm to 'em 'cause of what I said, will you now? Do say you won't now, Mr. Harley! She is good, though she 's a Catholic. She was kind to me when I was ill, and I wouldn't have her crossed—I 'd rather be showed up myself, I would!'

The wise youth gave no positive promise to Molly, and she had to read his consent in a relaxation of his austerity. The noise of a lumbering foot plodding down the lane caused her to be abruptly dismissed. Molly took to flight, the lumbering foot accelerated its pace, and the pastoral appeal to her flying skirts was heard: 'Moll! yau theyre! It be I—Bantam!' But the sprightly Silvia would not stop to his wooing, and Adrian turned away laughing at these Arcadians.

Adrian was a lazy dragon. All he did for the present was to hint and tease. 'It 's the inevitable!' he said, and asked himself why he should seek to arrest it. He had no faith in the System. Heavy Benson had. Benson of the slow, thick-lidded antediluvian eye and loose-crumpled

skin; Benson, the Saurian, the woman-hater; Benson was wide awake. A sort of rivalry existed between the wise youth and Heavy Benson. The fidelity of the latter dependant had moved the baronet to commit to him a portion of the management of the Raynham estate, and this Adrian did not like. No one who aspires to the honourable office of leading another by the nose can tolerate a party in his ambition. Benson's surly instinct told him he was in the wise youth's way, and he resolved to give his master a striking proof of his superior faithfulness. For some weeks the Saurian eye had been on the two secret creatures. Heavy Benson saw letters come and go in the day, and now the young gentleman was off and out every night, and seemed to be on wings. Benson knew whither he went, and the object he went for. It was a woman — that was enough. The Saurian eye had actually seen the sinful thing lure the Hope of Raynham into the shades. He composed several epistles of warning to the baronet of the work that was going on; but before sending one he wished to record a little of their guilty conversation; and for this purpose the faithful fellow trotted over the dews to eavesdrop, and thereby aroused the good fairy, in the person of Tom Bakewell, the sole confidant of Richard's state.

Tom said to his young master: 'Do you know what, sir? You be watched!'

Richard, in a fury, bade him name the wretch, and Tom hung his arms, and aped the respectable protrusion of the butler's head.

'It 's he, is it?' cried Richard. 'He shall rue it, Tom. If I find him near me when we 're together he shall never forget it.'

'Don't hit too hard, sir,' Tom suggested. 'You hit mortal hard when you 're in earnest, you know.'

Richard averred he would forgive anything but that, and told Tom to be within hail to-morrow night—he knew where. By the hour of the appointment it was out of the lover's mind.

Lady Blandish dined that evening at Raynham, by Adrian's pointed invitation. According to custom,

Richard started up and off, with few excuses. The lady exhibited no surprise. She and Adrian likewise strolled forth to enjoy the air of the summer night. They had no intention of spying. Still they may have thought, by meeting Richard and his inamorata, there was a chance of laying a foundation of ridicule to sap the passion. They may have thought so—they were on no spoken understanding.

'I have seen the little girl,' said Lady Blandish. 'She is pretty—she would be telling if she were well set up. She speaks well. How absurd it is of that class to educate their women above their station! The child is really too good for a farmer. I noticed her before I knew of this: she has enviable hair. I suppose she doesn't paint her eyelids. Just the sort of person to take a young man. I thought there was something wrong. I received, the day before yesterday, an impassioned poem evidently not intended for me. My hair was gold. My meeting him was foretold. My eyes were homes of light fringed with night. I sent it back, correcting the colours.'

'Which was death to the rhymes,' said Adrian. 'I saw her this morning. The boy hasn't bad taste. As you say, she is too good for a farmer. Such a spark would explode any system. She slightly affected mine. The Huron is stark mad about her.'

'But we must positively write and tell his father,' said Lady Blandish.

The wise youth did not see why they should exaggerate a trifle. The lady said she would have an interview with Richard, and then write, as it was her duty to do. Adrian shrugged, and was for going into the scientific explanation of Richard's conduct, in which the lady had to discourage him.

'Poor boy!' she sighed. 'I am really sorry for him. I hope he will not feel it too strongly. They feel strongly, father and son.'

'And select wisely,' Adrian added.

'That 's another thing,' said Lady Blandish.

Their talk was then of the dullness of neighbouring county people, about whom, it seemed there was little or

no scandal afloat: of the lady's loss of the season in town, which she professed not to regret, though she complained of her general weariness: of whether Mr. Morton of Poer Hall would propose to Mrs. Doria, and of the probable despair of the hapless curate of Lobourne; and other gossip, partly in French.

They rounded the lake, and got upon the road through the park to Lobourne. The moon had risen. The atmosphere was warm and pleasant.

'Quite a lover's night,' said Lady Blandish.

'And I, who have none to love—pity me!' The wise youth attempted a sigh.

'And never will have,' said Lady Blandish, curtly. 'You *buy* your loves.'

Adrian protested. However, he did not plead verbally against the impeachment, though the lady's decisive insight astonished him. He began to respect her, relishing her exquisite contempt, and he reflected that widows could be terrible creatures.

He had hoped to be a little sentimental with Lady Blandish, knowing her romantic. This mixture of the harshest common sense and an air of '*I* know you men,' with romance, and refined temperament, subdued the wise youth more than a positive accusation supported by witnesses would have done. He looked at the lady. Her face was raised to the moon. She knew nothing—she had simply spoken from the fullness of her human knowledge, and had forgotten her words. Perhaps, after all, her admiration, or whatever feeling it was, for the baronet, was sincere, and really the longing for a virtuous man. Perhaps she had tried the opposite set pretty much. Adrian shrugged. Whenever the wise youth encountered a mental difficulty he instinctively lifted his shoulders to equal altitudes, to show that he had no doubt there was a balance in the case—plenty to be said on both sides, which was the same to him as a definite solution.

At their tryst in the wood, abutting on Raynham Park, wrapped in themselves, piped to by tireless Love, Richard and Lucy sat, toying with eternal moments. How they seem as if they would never end! What mere sparks

they are when they have died out! And how in the distance of time they revive and extend and glow, and make us think them full the half, and the best of the fire of our lives!

With the onward flow of intimacy, the two happy lovers ceased to be so shy of common themes, and their speech did not reject all as dross that was not pure gold of emotion.

Lucy was very inquisitive about everything and everybody at Raynham. Whoever had been about Richard since his birth, she must know the history of, and he for a kiss will do her bidding.

Thus goes the tender duet:

'You should know my Cousin Austin, Lucy. Darling! Beloved!'

'My own! Richard!'

'You should know my Cousin Austin. You shall know him. He would take to you best of them all, and you to him. He is in the tropics now, looking out a place—it 's a secret—for poor English working-men to emigrate to and found a colony in that part of the world. My white angel!'

'Dear love!'

'He is such a noble fellow! Nobody here understands him but me. Isn't it strange? Since I met you I love him better! That 's because I love all that's good and noble better now—Beautiful! I love—I love you!'

'My Richard!'

'What do you think I 've determined, Lucy? If my father—but no! my father does love me. No! he will not; and we will be happy together here. And I will win my way with you. And whatever I win will be yours; for it will be owing to you. I feel as if I had no strength but yours—none! and you make me—oh, Lucy!'

His voice ebbs. Presently Lucy murmurs:

'Your father, Richard.'

'Yes, my father?'

'Dearest Richard! I feel so afraid of him.'

'He loves me, and will love you, Lucy.'

'But I am so poor and humble, Richard.'

'No one I have ever seen is like you, Lucy.'

'You think so, because you——'

'What?'

'Love me,' comes the blushing whisper, and the duet gives place to dumb variations, performed equally in concert.

It is resumed.

'You are fond of the knights, Lucy. Austin is as brave as any of them.—My own bride! Oh, how I adore you! When you are gone, I could fall upon the grass you tread upon, and kiss it. My breast feels empty of my heart—Lucy! if we lived in those days, I should have been a knight, and have won honour and glory for you. Oh! one can do nothing now. My lady-love! My lady-love! A tear?—Lucy?'

'Dearest! Ah, Richard! I am not a lady.'

'Who dares say that? Not a lady—the angel I love!'

'Think, Richard, who I am.'

'My beautiful! I think that God made you, and has given you to me.'

Her eyes fill with tears and, as she lifts them heavenward to thank her God, the light of heaven strikes on them, and she is so radiant in her pure beauty that the limbs of the young man tremble.

'Lucy! O heavenly spirit! Lucy!'

Tenderly her lips part—'I do not weep for sorrow.'

The big bright drops lighten, and roll down, imaged in his soul.

They lean together—shadows of ineffable tenderness playing on their thrilled cheeks and brows.

He lifts her hand, and presses his mouth to it. She has seen little of mankind, but her soul tells her this one is different from others, and at the thought, in her great joy, tears must come fast, or her heart will break—tears of boundless thanksgiving. And he, gazing on those soft, ray-illumined, dark-edged eyes, and the grace of her loose falling tresses, feels a scarce-sufferable holy fire streaming through his members.

It is long ere they speak in open tones.

'O happy day when we met!'

What says the voice of one, the soul of the other echoes.

'O glorious heaven looking down on us!'

Their souls are joined, are made one for evermore beneath that bending benediction.

'O eternity of bliss!'

Then the diviner mood passes, and they drop to earth.

'Lucy, come with me to-night, and look at the place where you are some day to live. Come, and I will row you on the lake. You remember what you said in your letter that you dreamt? that we were floating over the shadow of the abbey to the nuns at work by torchlight felling the cypress, and they handed us each a sprig. Why, darling, it was the best omen in the world, their felling the old trees. And you write such lovely letters. So pure and sweet they are. I love the nuns for having taught you.'

'Ah, Richard! See! we forget! Ah!' she lifts up her face pleadingly, as to plead against herself, 'even if your father forgives my birth, he will not my religion. And, dearest, though I would die for you I cannot change it. It would seem that I was denying God; and—oh! it would make me ashamed of my love.'

'Fear nothing!' He winds her about with his arm. 'Come! He will love us both, and love you the more for being faithful to your father's creed. You don't know him, Lucy. He seems harsh and stern—he is full of kindness and love. He isn't at all a bigot. And besides, when he hears what the nuns have done for you, won't he thank them, as I do? And—oh! I must speak to him soon, and you must be prepared to see him soon, for I cannot bear your remaining at Belthorpe, like a jewel in a sty. Mind! I 'm not saying a word against your uncle. I declare I love everybody and everything that sees you and touches you. Stay! it *is* a wonder how you could have grown there. But you were not born there, and your father had good blood. Desborough! there was a Colonel Desborough—never mind! Come!'

She dreads to. She begs not to. She is drawn away.

The woods are silent, and then:

'What think you of that for a pretty pastoral?' says a very different voice.

Adrian reclined against a pine overlooking the fern-

covert. Lady Blandish was recumbent upon the brown pine-droppings, gazing through a vista of the lower greenwood which opened out upon the moon-lighted valley, her hands clasped round one knee, her features almost stern in their set hard expression.

They had heard, by involuntarily overhearing about as much as may be heard in such positions, a luminous word or two.

The lady did not answer. A movement among the ferns attracted Adrian, and he stepped down the decline across the pine-roots to behold Heavy Benson below, shaking fern-seed and spidery substances off his crumpled skin.

'Is that you, Mr. Hadrian?' called Benson, starting, as he puffed, and exercised his handkerchief.

'Is it *you*, Benson, who have had the audacity to spy upon these mysteries?' Adrian called back, and coming close to him, added, 'You look as if you had just been well thrashed.'

'Isn't it dreadful, sir?' snuffled Benson. 'And his father in ignorance, Mr. Hadrian!'

'He shall know, Benson! He shall know how you have endangered your valuable skin in his service. If Mr. Richard had found you there just now I wouldn't answer for the consequences.'

'Ha!' Benson spitefully retorted. 'This won't go on, Mr. Hadrian. It shan't, sir. It will be put a stop to to-morrow, sir. I call it corruption of a young gentleman like him, and harlotry, sir, I call it. I 'd have every jade flogged that made a young innocent gentleman go on like that, sir.'

'Then why didn't you stop it yourself, Benson? Ah, I see! you waited—what? This is not the first time you have been attendant on Apollo and Miss Dryope? You have written to headquarters?'

'I did my duty, Mr. Hadrian.'

The wise youth returned to Lady Blandish, and informed her of Benson's zeal. The lady's eyes flashed. 'I hope Richard will treat him as he deserves,' she said.

'Shall we home?' Adrian inquired.

'Do me a favour,' the lady replied. 'Get my carriage sent round to meet me at the park gates.'

'Won't you——?'

'I want to be left alone.'

Adrian bowed and left her. She was still sitting with her hands clasped round one knee, gazing towards the dim ray-strewn valley.

'An odd creature!' muttered the wise youth. 'She's as odd as any of them. She ought to be a Feverel. I suppose she's graduating for it. Hang that confounded old ass of a Benson! He has had the impudence to steal a march on me!'

The shadow of the cypress was lessening on the lake. The moon was climbing high. As Richard rowed the boat, Lucy sang to him softly. She sang first a fresh little French song, reminding him of a day when she had been asked to sing to him before, and he did not care to hear. 'Did I live?' he thinks. Then she sang to him a bit of one of those majestic old Gregorian chants, that, wherever you may hear them, seem to build up cathedral walls about you. The young man dropped the sculls. The strange solemn notes gave a religious tone to his love, and wafted him into the knightly ages and the reverential heart of chivalry.

Hanging between two heavens on the lake: floating to her voice: the moon stepping over and through white shoals of soft high clouds above and below: floating to her voice—no other breath abroad! His soul went out of his body as he listened.

They must part. He rows her gently shoreward.

'I never was so happy as to-night,' she murmurs.

'Look, my Lucy. The lights of the old place are on the lake. Look where you are to live.'

'Which is your room, Richard?'

He points it out to her.

'Oh, Richard! that I were one of the women who wait on you! I should ask nothing more. How happy she must be!'

'My darling angel-love. You shall be happy; but all shall wait on you, and I foremost, Lucy.'

'Dearest! may I hope for a letter?'

'By eleven to-morrow. And I?'

'Oh, you will have mine, Richard.'

'Tom shall wait for it. A long one, mind! Did you like my last song?'

She puts her hand quietly against her bosom, and he knows where it rests. O love! O heaven!

They are aroused by the harsh grating of the bow of the boat against the shingle. He jumps out, and lifts her ashore.

'See!' she says, as the blush of his embrace subsides, 'see!' and prettily she mimics awe and feels it a little, 'the cypress does point towards us. Oh, Richard, it does!'

And he, looking at her rather than at the cypress, delighting in her arch grave ways:

'Why, there 's hardly any shadow at all, Lucy. She mustn't dream, my darling! or dream only of me.'

'Dearest! but I do.'

'To-morrow, Lucy! The letter in the morning, and you at night. O happy to-morrow!'

'You will be sure to be there, Richard?'

'If I am not dead, Lucy.'

'Oh, Richard! pray, pray do not speak of that. I shall not survive you.'

'Let us pray, Lucy, to die together, when we are to die. Death or life, with you! Who is it yonder? I see someone—is it Tom? It 's Adrian!'

'Is it Mr. Harley?' The fair girl shivered.

'How dares he come here!' cried Richard.

The figure of Adrian, instead of advancing, discreetly circled the lake. They were stealing away when he called. His call was repeated. Lucy entreated Richard to go to him; but the young man preferred to summon his attendant, Tom, from within hail, and send him to know what was wanted.

'Will he have seen me? Will he have known me?' whispered Lucy tremulously.

'And if he does, love?' said Richard.

'Oh! if he does, dearest—I don't know, but I feel such a presentiment. You have not spoken of him to-night, Richard. Is he good?'

'Good?' Richard clutched her hand for the innocent maiden phrase. 'He 's very fond of eating; that's all I know of Adrian.'

Her hand was at his lips when Tom returned.

'Well, Tom?'

'Mr. Adrian wishes particular to speak to you, sir,' said Tom.

'Do go to him, dearest! Do go!' Lucy begs him.

'Oh, how I hate Adrian!' The young man grinds his teeth.

'Do go!' Lucy urges him. 'Tom—good Tom—will see me home. To-morrow, dear love! To-morrow!'

'You wish to part from me?'

'Oh, unkind! but you must not come with me now. It may be news of importance, dearest. Think, Richard!'

'Tom! go back!'

At the imperious command the well-drilled Tom strides off a dozen paces, and sees nothing. Then the precious charge is confided to him. A heart is cut in twain.

Richard made his way to Adrian. 'What is it you want with me, Adrian?'

'Are we seconds, or principals, O fiery one?' was Adrian's answer. 'I want nothing with you, except to know whether you have seen Benson.'

'Where should I see Benson? What do I know of Benson's doings?'

'Of course not—such a secret old fist as he is! I want someone to tell him to order Lady Blandish's carriage to be sent round to the park gates. I thought he might be round your way over there—I came upon him accidentally just now in Abbey Wood. What 's the matter, boy?'

'You saw him *there*?'

'Hunting Diana, I suppose. He thinks she 's not so chaste as they say,' continued Adrian. 'Are you going to knock down that tree?'

Richard had turned to the cypress, and was tugging at the tough wood. He left it and went to an ash.

'You 'll spoil that weeper,' Adrian cried. 'Down she comes! But good-night, Ricky. If you see Benson, mind you tell him.'

Doomed Benson following his burly shadow hove in sight on the white road while Adrian spoke. The wise youth chuckled and strolled round the lake, glancing over his shoulder every now and then.

It was not long before he heard a bellow for help—the roar of a dragon in his throes. Adrian placidly sat down on the grass, and fixed his eyes on the water. There, as the roar was being repeated amid horrid resounding echoes, the wise youth mused in this wise:

'"The Fates are Jews with us when they delay a punishment," says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, or words to that effect. The heavens evidently love Benson, seeing that he gets his punishment on the spot. Master Ricky is a peppery young man. He gets it from the ap Gruffudh. I rather believe in race. What a noise that old ruffian makes! He 'll require poulticing with *The Pilgrim's Scrip*. We shall have a message to-morrow, and a hubbub, and perhaps all go to town, which won't be bad for one who 's been a prey to all the desires born of dullness. Benson howls: there 's life in the old dog yet! He bays the moon. Look at her. She doesn't care. It 's the same to her whether we coo like turtle-doves or roar like twenty lions. How complacent she looks! And yet she has just as much sympathy for Benson as for Cupid. She would smile on if both were being birched. Was that a raven or Benson? He howls no more. It sounds guttural: frog-like—something between the brek-kek-kek and the hoarse raven's croak. The fellow 'll be killing him. It 's time to go to the rescue. A deliverer gets more honour by coming in at the last gasp than if he forestalled catastrophe.—Ho, there, what 's the matter?'

So saying, the wise youth rose, and leisurely trotted to the scene of battle, where stood St. George puffing over the prostrate dragon.

'Hallo, Ricky! is it you?' said Adrian. 'What 's this? Whom have we here? Benson, as I live!'

'Make this beast get up,' Richard returned, breathing hard, and shaking his great ash-branch.

'He seems incapable, my dear boy. What have you been up to? Benson! Benson! I say, Ricky, this looks bad.'

'He 's shamming!' Richard clamoured like a savage. 'Spy upon me, will he? I tell you, he 's shamming. He hasn't had half enough. Nothing 's too bad for a spy. Let him get up!'

'Insatiate youth! do throw away that enormous weapon.'

'He has written to my father,' Richard shouted. 'The miserable spy! Let him get up!'

'Ooogh! I won't!' huskily groaned Benson. 'Mr. Hadrian, you 're a witness he 's—my back!' Cavernous noises took up the tale of his maltreatment.

'I dare say you love your back better than any part of your body now,' Adrian muttered. 'Come, Benson, be a man! Mr. Richard has thrown away the stick. Come, and get off home, and let 's see the extent of the damage.'

'Ooogh! he 's a devil! Mr. Hadrian, sir, he 's a devil!' groaned Benson, turning half over in the road to ease his aches.

Adrian caught hold of Benson's collar and lifted him to a sitting posture. He had then a glimpse of what his hopeful pupil's hand could do in wrath. The wretched butler's coat was slit and welted; his hat knocked in; his flabby spirit so broken that he started and trembled if his pitiless executioner stirred a foot. Richard stood over him, grasping his great stick; no dawn of mercy for Benson in any corner of his features.

Benson screwed his neck round to look up at him, and immediately gasped: 'I won't get up! I won't! He 's ready to murder me again! Mr. Hadrian! if you stand by and see it, you 're liable to the law, sir—I won't get up while he 's near.' No persuasion could induce Benson to try his legs while his executioner stood by.

Adrian took Richard aside: 'You 've almost killed the poor devil, Ricky. You must be satisfied with that. Look at his face.'

'The coward bobbed while I struck,' said Richard. 'I marked his back. He ducked. I told him he was getting it worse.'

At so civilized a piece of savagery, Adrian opened his mouth wide.

'Did you really? I admire that. You told him he was getting it worse?'

Adrian opened his mouth again to shake another roll of laughter out.

'Come,' he said, 'Excalibur has done his work. Pitch him into the lake. And see—here comes the Blandish. You can't be at it again before a woman. Go and meet her, and tell her the noise was an ox being slaughtered. Or say Argus.'

With a whirr that made all Benson's bruises moan and quiver, the great ash-branch shot aloft, and Richard swung off to intercept Lady Blandish.

Adrian got Benson on his feet. The heavy butler was disposed to summon all the commiseration he could feel for his bruised flesh. Every half-step he attempted was like a dislocation. His groans and grunts were frightful.

'How much did that hat cost, Benson?' said Adrian, as he put it on his head.

'A five-and-twenty shilling beaver, Mr. Hadrian!' Benson caressed its injuries.

'The cheapest policy of insurance I remember to have heard of!' said Adrian.

Benson staggered, moaning at intervals to his cruel comforter:

'He 's a devil, Mr. Hadrian! He 's a devil, sir, I do believe, sir. Ooogh! he 's a devil! I can't move, Mr. Hadrian. I must be fetched. And Dr. Clifford must be sent for, sir. I shall never be fit for work again. I haven't a sound bone in my body, Mr. Hadrian.'

'You see, Benson, this comes of your declaring war upon Venus. I hope the maids will nurse you properly. Let me see: you are friends with the housekeeper, aren't you? All depends upon that.'

'I 'm only a faithful servant, Mr. Hadrian,' the miserable butler snarled.

'Then you 've got no friend but your bed. Get to it as quick as possible, Benson.'

'I can't move,' Benson made a resolute halt. 'I must be fetched,' he whinnied. 'It 's a shame to ask me to move, Mr. Hadrian.'

'You will admit that you are heavy, Benson,' said Adrian, 'so I can't carry you. However, I see Mr. Richard is very kindly returning to help me.'

At these words Heavy Benson instantly found his legs, and shambled on.

Lady Blandish met Richard in dismay.

'I have been horribly frightened,' she said. 'Tell me, what was the meaning of those cries I heard?'

'Only someone doing justice on a spy,' said Richard, and the lady smiled, and looked on him fondly, and put her hand through his hair.

'Was that all? I should have done it myself if I had been a man. Kiss me.'

CHAPTER XXI

RICHARD IS SUMMONED TO TOWN TO HEAR A SERMON

By twelve o'clock at noon next day the inhabitants of Raynham Abbey knew that Berry, the baronet's man, had arrived post-haste from town, with orders to conduct Mr. Richard thither, and that Mr. Richard had refused to go, had sworn he would not, defied his father, and dispatched Berry to the Shades. Berry was all that Benson was not. Whereas Benson hated woman, Berry admired her warmly. Second to his own stately person, woman occupied his reflections, and commanded his homage. Berry was of majestic port, and used dictionary words. Among the maids of Raynham his conscious calves produced all the discord and the frenzy those adornments seem destined to create in tender bosoms. He had, moreover, the reputation of having suffered for the sex; which assisted his object in inducing the sex to suffer for him. What with his calves, and his dictionary words, and the attractive halo of the mysterious vindictiveness of Venus surrounding him, this Adonis of the lower household was a mighty man below, and he moved as one.

On hearing the tumult that followed Berry's arrival, Adrian sent for him, and was informed of the nature of his mission, and its result.

'You should come to me first,' said Adrian. 'I should have imagined you were shrewd enough for that, Berry?'

'Pardon me, Mr. Adrian,' Berry doubled his elbow to explain. 'Pardon me, sir. Acting recipient of special injunctions, I was not a free agent.'

'Go to Mr. Richard again, Berry. There will be a little confusion if he holds back. Perhaps you had better throw out a hint or so of apoplexy. A slight hint will do. And here—Berry! when you return to town, you had better not mention anything—to quote Johnson—of Benson's spiflication.'

'Certainly not, sir.'

The wise youth's hint had the desired effect on Richard. He dashed off a hasty letter by Tom to Belthorpe, and, mounting his horse, galloped to the Bellingham station.

Sir Austin was sitting down to a quiet early dinner at his hotel, when the Hope of Raynham burst into his room.

The baronet was not angry with his son. On the contrary, for he was singularly just and self-accusing while pride was not up in arms, he had been thinking all day after the receipt of Benson's letter that he was deficient in cordiality, and did not, by reason of his excessive anxiety, make himself sufficiently his son's companion: was not enough, as he strove to be, mother and father to him; preceptor and friend; previsor and associate. He had not to ask his conscience where he had lately been to blame towards the System. He had slunk away from Raynham in the very crisis of the magnetic age, and this young woman of the parish (as Benson had termed sweet Lucy in his letter) was the consequence.

Yes, pride and sensitiveness were his chief foes, and he would trample on them. To begin, he embraced his son: hard upon an Englishman at any time—doubly so to one so shamefaced at emotion in cool blood, as it were. It gave him a strange pleasure, nevertheless. And the youth seemed to answer to it; he was excited. Was his love, then, beginning to correspond with his father's as in those intimate days before the blossoming season?

But when Richard, inarticulate at first in his haste, cried out: 'My dear, dear father! You are safe! I feared —— You are better, sir? Thank God!' Sir Austin stood away from him.

'Safe?' he said. 'What has alarmed you?'

Instead of replying, Richard dropped into a chair, and seized his hand and kissed it.

Sir Austin took a seat, and waited for his son to explain.

'Those doctors are such fools!' Richard broke out. 'I was sure they were wrong. They don't know headache from apoplexy. It 's worth the ride, sir, to see you. You left Raynham so suddenly—but you are well! It was not an attack of real apoplexy?'

His father's brows contorted, and he said, No, it was not. Richard pursued:

'If you were ill, I couldn't come too soon, though, if coroner's inquests sat on horses, those doctors would be found guilty of mare-slaughter. Cassandra 'll be knocked up. I was too early for the train at Bellingham, and I wouldn't wait. She did the distance in four hours and three-quarters. Pretty good, sir, wasn't it?'

'It has given you appetite for dinner, I hope,' said the baronet, not so well pleased to find that it was not simple obedience that had brought the youth to him in such haste.

'I 'm ready,' replied Richard. 'I shall be in time to return by the last train to-night. I will leave Cassandra in your charge for a rest.'

His father quietly helped him to soup, which he commenced gobbling with an eagerness that might pass for appetite.

'All well at Raynham?' said the baronet.

'Quite, sir.'

'Nothing new?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'The same as when I left?'

'No change whatever.'

'I shall be glad to get back to the old place,' said the baronet. 'My stay in town has certainly been profitable. I have made some pleasant acquaintances who may probably favour us with a visit there in the late autumn—people you may be pleased to know. They are very anxious to see Raynham.'

'I love the old place,' cried Richard. 'I never wish to leave it.'

'Why, boy, before I left you were constantly begging to see town.'

'Was I, sir? How odd! Well! I don't want to remain here. I 've seen enough of it.'

'How did you find your way to me?'

Richard laughed, and related his bewilderment at the miles of brick, and the noise, and the troops of people, concluding: 'There 's no place like home!'

The baronet watched his symptomatic brilliant eyes, and favoured him with a double-dealing sentence:

'To anchor the heart by any object ere we have half traversed the world, is youth's foolishness, my son. Reverence time! A better maxim that than your Horatian.'

'He knows all!' thought Richard, and instantly drew away leagues from his father, and threw up fortifications round his love and himself.

Dinner over, Richard looked hurriedly at his watch, and said, with much briskness: 'I shall just be in time, sir, if we walk. Will you come with me to the station?'

The baronet did not answer.

Richard was going to repeat the question, but found his father's eyes fixed on him so meaningly that he wavered, and played with his empty glass.

'I think we will have a little more claret,' said the baronet.

Claret was brought, and they were left alone.

The baronet then drew within arm's reach of his son, and began:

'I am not aware what you may have thought of me, Richard, during the years we have lived together; and indeed I have never been in a hurry to be known to you; and, if I had died before my work was done, I should not have complained at losing half my reward, in hearing you thank me. Perhaps, as it is, I never may. Everything, save selfishness, has its recompense. I shall be content if you prosper.'

He fetched a breath and continued: 'You had in your infancy a great loss.' Father and son coloured simultaneously. 'To make that good to you I chose to isolate myself from the world, and devote myself entirely to your welfare; and I think it is not vanity that tells me now that the son I have reared is one of the most hopeful of God's creatures. But for that very reason you are open to be tempted the most, and to sink the deepest. It was the first of the angels who made the road to hell.'

He paused again. Richard fingered at his watch.

'In our House, my son, there is peculiar blood. We

go to wreck very easily. It sounds like superstition; I cannot but think we are tried as most men are not. I see it in us all. And you, my son, are compounded of two races. Your passions are violent. You have had a taste of revenge. You have seen, in a small way, that the pound of flesh draws rivers of blood. But there is now in you another power. You are mounting to the tableland of life, where mimic battles are changed to real ones. And you come upon it laden equally with force to create and to destroy.' He deliberated to announce the intelligence, with deep meaning: 'There are women in the world, my son!

The young man's heart galloped back to Raynham.

'It is when you encounter them that you are thoroughly on trial. It is when you know them that life is either a mockery to you, or, as some find it, a gift of blessedness. They are our ordeal. Love of any human object is the soul's ordeal; and they are ours, loving them, or not.'

The young man heard the whistle of the train. He saw the moon-lighted wood, and the vision of his beloved. He could barely hold himself down and listen.

'I believe,' the baronet spoke with little of the cheerfulness of belief, 'good women exist.'

Oh, if he knew Lucy!

'But,' and he gazed on Richard intently, 'it is given to very few to meet them on the threshold—I may say, to none. We find them after hard buffeting, and usually, when we find the one fitted for us, our madness has misshaped our destiny, our lot is cast. For women are not the end, but the means, of life. In youth we think them the former, and thousands, who have not even the excuse of youth, select a mate—or worse—with that sole view. I believe women punish us for so perverting their uses. They punish society.'

The baronet put his hand to his brow as his mind travelled into consequences.

'Our most diligent pupil learns not so much as an earnest teacher,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*; and Sir Austin, in schooling himself to speak with moderation of women, was beginning to get a glimpse of their side of the case.

Cold Blood now touched on love to Hot Blood.

Cold Blood said: 'It is a passion coming in the order of nature, the ripe fruit of our animal being.'

Hot Blood felt: 'It is a divinity! All that is worth living for in the world.'

Cold Blood said: 'It is a fever which tests our strength, and too often leads to perdition.'

Hot Blood felt: 'Lead whither it will, I follow it.'

Cold Blood said: 'It is a name men and women are much in the habit of employing to sanctify their appetites.'

Hot Blood felt: 'It is worship; religion; life!'

And so the two parallel lines ran on.

The baronet became more personal:

'You know my love for you, my son. The extent of it you cannot know; but you must know that it is something very deep, and—I do not wish to speak of it—but a father must sometimes petition for gratitude, since the only true expression of it is his son's moral good. If you care for my love, or love me in return, aid me with all your energies to keep you what I have made you, and guard you from the snares besetting you. It was in my hands once. It is ceasing to be so. Remember, my son, what my love is. It is different, I fear, with most fathers: but I am bound up in your welfare: what you do affects me vitally. You will take no step that is not intimate with my happiness, or my misery. And I have had great disappointments, my son.'

So far it was well. Richard loved his father, and even in his frenzied state he could not without emotion hear him thus speak.

Unhappily, the baronet, who by some fatality never could see when he was winning the battle, thought proper in his wisdom to water the dryness of his sermon with a little jocoseness, on the subject of young men fancying themselves in love, and, when they were raw and green, absolutely wanting to be—that most awful thing, which the wisest and strongest of men undertake in hesitation and after self-mortification and penance—married! He sketched the Foolish Young Fellow—the object of general ridicule and covert contempt. He sketched the woman—

the strange thing made in our image, and with all our faculties—passing to the rule of one who in taking her proved that he could not rule himself, and had no knowledge of her save as a choice morsel which he would burn the whole world, and himself in the bargain, to possess. He harped upon the Foolish Young Fellow, till the foolish young fellow felt his skin tingle and was half suffocated with shame and rage.

After this, the baronet might be as wise as he pleased: he had quite undone his work. He might analyse love and anatomize woman. He might accord to her her due position, and paint her fair: he might be shrewd, jocose, gentle, pathetic, wonderfully wise: he spoke to deaf ears.

Closing his sermon with the question, softly uttered: 'Have you anything to tell me, Richard?' and hoping for a confession, and a thorough re-establishment of confidence, the callous answer struck him cold: 'I have not.'

The baronet relapsed in his chair, and made diagrams of his fingers.

Richard turned his back on further dialogue by going to the window. In the section of sky over the street twinkled two or three stars; shining faintly, feeling the moon. The moon was rising: the woods were lifting up to her: his star of the woods would be there. A bed of moss set about flowers in a basket under him breathed to his nostril of the woodland keenly, and filled him with delirious longing.

A succession of hard sighs brought his father's hand on his shoulder.

'You have nothing you could say to me, my son? Tell me, Richard! Remember, there is no home for the soul where dwells a shadow of untruth!'

'Nothing at all, sir,' the young man replied, meeting him with the full orbs of his eyes.

The baronet withdrew his hand, and paced the room.

At last it grew impossible for Richard to control his impatience, and he said: 'Do you intend me to stay here, sir? Am I not to return to Raynham at all to-night?'

His father was again falsely jocular:

CHAPTER XXII

INDICATES THE APPROACHES OF FEVER

For three weeks Richard had to remain in town and endure the teachings of the System in a new atmosphere. He had to sit and listen to men of science who came to renew their intimacy with his father, and whom of all men his father wished him to respect and study; practically scientific men being, in the baronet's estimation, the only minds thoroughly mated and enviable. He had to endure an introduction to the Grandisons, and meet the eyes of his kind, haunted as he was by the Foolish Young Fellow. The idea that he might by any chance be identified with him held the poor youth in silent subjection. And it was horrible. For it was a continued outrage on the fair image he had in his heart. The notion of the world laughing at him because he loved sweet Lucy stung him to momentary frenzies, and developed premature misanthropy in his spirit. Also the System desired to show him whither young women of the parish lead us, and he was dragged about at night-time to see the sons and daughters of darkness, after the fashion prescribed to Mr. Thompson; how they danced and ogled down the high road of perdition. But from this sight possibly the teacher learnt more than his pupil, since we find him seriously asking his meditative hours in the note-book: 'Wherefore wild oats are only of one gender?' a question certainly not suggested to him at Raynham; and again—'Whether men might not be attaching too rigid an importance . . . ?' to a subject with a dotted tail apparently, for he gives it no other in the note-book. But, as I apprehend, he had come to plead in behalf of women here, and had deduced something from positive observation. To Richard the scenes he witnessed were strange wild pictures, likely if anything to have increased his misanthropy, but for his love.

Certain sweet little notes from Lucy sustained the lover during the first two weeks of exile. They ceased; and now Richard fell into such despondency that his father in alarm had to take measures to hasten their return to Raynham. At the close of the third week Berry laid a pair of letters, bearing the Raynham postmark, on the breakfast-table, and, after reading one attentively, the baronet asked his son if he was inclined to quit the metropolis.

'For Raynham, sir?' cried Richard, and relapsed, saying: 'As you will!' aware that he had given a glimpse of the Foolish Young Fellow.

Berry accordingly received orders to make arrangements for their instant return to Raynham.

The letter Sir Austin lifted his head from to bespeak his son's wishes was a composition of the wise youth Adrian's, and ran thus:

> Benson is doggedly recovering. He requires great indemnities. Happy when a faithful fool is the main sufferer in a household! I quite agree with you that our faithful fool is the best servant of great schemes. Benson is now a piece of history. I tell him that this is indemnity enough, and that the sweet Muse usually insists upon gentlemen being half-flayed before she will condescend to notice them; but Benson, I regret to say, rejects the comfort so fine a reflection should offer, and had rather keep his skin and live opaque. Heroism seems partly a matter of training. Faithful folly is Benson's nature: the rest has been thrust upon him.
>
> The young person has resigned the neighbourhood. I had an interview with the fair papist myself, and also with the man Blaize. They were both sensible, though one swore and the other sighed. She is pretty. I hope she does not paint. I can affirm that her legs are strong, for she walks to Bellingham twice a week to take her Scarlet bath, when, having confessed and been made clean by the Romish unction, she walks back the brisker, of which my Protestant muscular system is yet aware. It was on the road to Bellingham I engaged her. She is well in the matter of hair. Madam Godiva might challenge her, it would be a fair match. Has it never struck you that Woman is nearer the *vegetable* than Man?—Mr. Blaize intends her for his son—a junction that every lover of fairy mythology must desire to see consummated. Young Tom is heir to all the *agrémens* of the Beast. The maids of Lobourne say (I hear) that he is a very Proculus among them. Possibly the envious men say it for the maids. Beauty does not speak bad grammar—and altogether she is better out of the way.

The other letter was from Lady Blandish, a lady's letter, and said:

I have fulfilled your commission to the best of my ability, and heartily sad it has made me. She is indeed very much above her station—pity that it is so! She is almost beautiful—*quite* beautiful at times, and not in *any way* what you have been led to fancy. The poor child had no story to tell. I have again seen her, and talked with her for an hour as kindly as I could. I could gather nothing more than we know. It is just a woman's history as it invariably commences. Richard is the god of her idolatry. She will renounce him, and sacrifice herself for his sake. Are we so bad? She asked me what she was to do. She would do whatever was imposed upon her—all but pretend to love another, and that she never would, and, I believe, *never will*. You know I am sentimental, and I confess we dropped a *few tears* together. Her uncle has sent her for the winter to the institution where it appears she was educated, and where they are very fond of her and want to keep her, which it would be a good thing if they were to do. The man is a good sort of man. She was entrusted to him by her father, and he never interferes with her religion, and is very scrupulous about all that pertains to it, though, as he says, he is a Christian himself. In the spring (but the poor child does not know this) she is to come back, and be married to his lout of a son. I am *determined* to prevent that. May I not reckon on your promise to aid me? When you see her, I am sure you will. It would be sacrilege to look on and permit such a thing. You know, they are *cousins*. She asked me, where in the world was there one like Richard? What could I answer? They were your own words, and spoken with a depth of conviction! I hope he is really calm. I shudder to think of him when he comes, and discovers what I have been doing. I hope I have been really doing right! A good deed, you say, never dies; but we cannot always know—I must rely on you. Yes, it is, I should think, easy to suffer martyrdom when one is sure of one's cause! but then one *must* be sure of it. I have done nothing lately but to repeat to myself that saying of yours, No. 54, C. 7, P.S.; and it has consoled me, I cannot say why, except that all wisdom consoles, whether it applies directly or not:

'For this reason so many fall from God, who have attained to Him; that they cling to Him with their weakness, not with their strength.'

I like to know of what you were thinking when you composed this or that saying—what *suggested* it. May not one be admitted to iuspect the machinery of wisdom? I feel curious to know how thoughts—*real* thoughts—are born. Not that I hope to win the secret. Here is the beginning of one (but we poor women can never put together even two of the three ideas which you say go to form a thought): 'When a wise man makes a false step, will he not go farther than a fool?' It has just flitted through me.

I cannot get on with Gibbon, so wait your return to recommence the readings. I dislike the *sneering essence* of his writings. I keep

referring to his face, until the dislike seems to become personal. How different is it with Wordsworth! And yet I cannot escape from the thought that he is always solemnly thinking of himself (but I *do* reverence him). But this is curious; Byron was a greater egoist, and yet I do not feel the same with him. He reminds me of a beast of the desert, savage and beautiful; and the former is what one would imagine a superior donkey reclaimed from the heathen to be—a *very* superior donkey I mean, with great power of speech and great natural complacency, and whose stubbornness you must admire as part of his mission. The worst is that no one will imagine anything sublime in a superior donkey, so my simile is unfair and false. Is it not strange? I love Wordsworth best, and yet Byron has the greater power over me. How is that?'

('Because,' Sir Austin wrote beside the query in pencil, 'women are cowards, and succumb to irony and passion, rather than yield their hearts to excellence and Nature's inspiration.')

The letter pursued:

I have finished Boiardo and have taken up Berni. The latter offends me. I suppose we women do not really care for humour. You are right in saying we have none ourselves, and 'cackle' instead of laugh. It is true (of me, at least) that 'Falstaff is only to us an incorrigible fat man.' I want to know what he *illustrates*. And Don Quixote—what end can be served in making a noble mind ridiculous?—I hear you say—practical! So it is. We are very narrow, I know. But we like wit—practical again! Or in your words (when I really *think* they generally come to my aid—perhaps it is that it is often all *your thought*); we 'prefer the rapier thrust, to the broad embrace, of intelligence.'

He trifled with the letter for some time, re-reading chosen passages as he walked about the room, and considering he scarce knew what. There are ideas language is too gross for, and shape too arbitrary, which come to us and have a definite influence upon us, and yet we cannot fasten on the filmy things and make them visible and distinct to ourselves, much less to others. Why did he twice throw a look into the glass in the act of passing it? He stood for a moment with erect head facing it. His eyes for the nonce seemed little to peruse his outer features; the grey-gathered brows, and the wrinkles much action of them had traced over the circles half up his high straight forehead; the iron-grey hair that rose over his forehead and fell away in the fashion of Richard's plume. His general appearance

showed the tints of years, but none of their weight; and nothing of the dignity of his youth was gone. It was so far satisfactory, but his eyes were wide, as one who looks at his essential self through the mask we wear. Perhaps he was speculating as he looked on the sort of aspect he presented to the lady's discriminative regard. Of her feelings he had not a suspicion. But he knew with what extraordinary lucidity women can, when it pleases them, and when their feelings are not quite boiling under the noonday sun, seize all the sides of a character, and put their fingers on its weak point. He was cognizant of the total absence of the humorous in himself (the want that most shut him out from his fellows), and perhaps the clear-thoughted, intensely self-examining gentleman filmily conceived, Me also, in common with the poet, she gazes on as one of the superior—grey beasts!

He may have so conceived the case; he was capable of that great-mindedness, and could snatch at times very luminous glances at the broad reflector which the world of fact lying outside our narrow compass holds up for us to see ourselves in when we will. Unhappily, the faculty of laughter, which is due to this gift, was denied him; and having seen, he, like the companion of friend Balaam, could go no farther. For a good wind of laughter had relieved him of much of the blight of self-deception, and oddness, and extravagance; had given a healthier view of our atmosphere of life; but he had it not.

Journeying back to Bellingham in the train, with the heated brain and brilliant eye of his son beside him, Sir Austin tried hard to feel infallible, as a man with a System should feel; and because he could not do so, after much mental conflict, he descended to entertain a personal antagonism to the young woman who had stepped in between his experiment and success. He did not think kindly of her. Lady Blandish's encomiums of her behaviour and her beauty annoyed him. Forgetful that he had in a measure forfeited his rights to it, he took the common ground of fathers, and demanded: 'Why he was not justified in doing all that lay in his power to prevent his son from casting himself away upon the first creature with a pretty

face he encountered?' Deliberating thus, he lost the tenderness he should have had for his experiment—the living, burning youth at his elbow, and his excessive love for him took a rigorous tone. It appeared to him politic, reasonable, and just that the uncle of this young woman, who had so long nursed the prudent scheme of marrying her to his son, should not only not be thwarted in his object but encouraged and even assisted. At least, not thwarted. Sir Austin had no glass before him while these ideas hardened in his mind, and he had rather forgotten the letter of Lady Blandish.

Father and son were alone in the railway carriage. Both were too preoccupied to speak. As they neared Bellingham, the dark was filling the hollows of the country. Over the pine-hills beyond the station a last rosy streak lingered across a green sky. Richard eyed it while they flew along. It caught him forward: it seemed full of the spirit of his love, and brought tears of mournful longing to his eyelids. The sad beauty of that one spot in the heavens seemed to call out to his soul to swear to his Lucy's truth to him: was like the sorrowful visage of his fleur-de-luce, as he called her, appealing to him for faith. That tremulous tender way she had of half-closing and catching light on the nether-lids, when sometimes she looked up in her lover's face—a look so mystic sweet that it had grown to be the fountain of his dreams: he saw it yonder, and his blood thrilled.

Know you those wand-like touches of I know not what, before which our grosser being melts, and we, much as we hope to be in the Awaking, stand etherealized, trembling with new joy? They come but rarely; rarely even in love, when we fondly think them revelations. Mere sensation they are, doubtless: and we rank for them no higher in the spiritual scale than so many translucent glorious polypi that quiver on the shores, the hues of heaven running through them. Yet in the harvest of our days it is something for the animal to have had such mere fleshly polypian experiences to look back upon, and they give him an horizon—pale seas of luring splendour. One who has had them (when they do not bound him) may find the Isles

of Bliss sooner than another. Sensual faith in the upper glories is something. 'Let us remember,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, 'that Nature, though heathenish, reaches at her best to the footstool of the Highest. She is not all dust, but a living portion of the spheres. In aspiration it is our error to despise her, forgetting that through Nature only can we *ascend*. Cherished, trained, and purified, she is then partly worthy the divine mate who is to make her wholly so. St. Simeon saw the Hog in Nature, and took Nature for the Hog.'

It was one of these strange bodily exaltations which thrilled the young man, he knew not how it was, for sadness and his forebodings vanished. The soft wand touched him. At that moment, had Sir Austin spoken openly, Richard might have fallen upon his heart. He could not. He chose to feel injured on the common ground of fathers, and to pursue his System by plotting. Lady Blandish had revived his jealousy of the creature who menaced it, and jealousy of a System is unreflecting and vindictive as jealousy of woman.

Heath-roots and pines breathed sharp in the cool autumn evening about the Bellingham station. Richard stood a moment as he stepped from the train, and drew the country air into his lungs with large heaves of the chest. Leaving his father to the felicitations of the station-master, he went into the Lobourne road to look for his faithful Tom, who had received private orders through Berry to be in attendance with his young master's mare, Cassandra, and was lurking in a plantation of firs unenclosed on the borders of the road, where Richard, knowing his retainer's zest for conspiracy too well to seek him anywhere but in the part most favoured with shelter and concealment, found him furtively whiffing tobacco.

'What news, Tom? Is there an illness?'

Tom sent his undress cap on one side to scratch at dilemma, an old agricultural habit to which he was still a slave in moments of abstract thought or sudden difficulty.

'No, I don't want the rake, Mr. Richard,' he whinnied with a false grin, as he beheld his master's eye vacantly following the action.

'Speak out!' he was commanded. 'I haven't had a letter for a week!'

Richard learnt the news. He took it with surprising outward calm, only getting a little closer to Cassandra's neck, and looking very hard at Tom without seeing a speck of him, which had the effect on Tom of making him sincerely wish his master would punch his head at once rather than fix him in that owl-like way.

'Go on!' said Richard huskily. 'Yes? She 's gone! Well?'

Tom was brought to understand he must make the most of trifles, and recited how he had heard from a female domestic at Belthorpe of the name of Davenport, formerly known to him, that the young lady never slept a wink from the hour she knew she was going, but sat up in her bed till morning crying most pitifully, though she never complained. Hereat the tears unconsciously streamed down Richard's cheeks. Tom said he had tried to see her, but Mr. Adrian kept him at work, ciphering at a terrible sum—that and nothing else all day, saying it was to please his young master on his return. 'Likewise something in Lat'n,' added Tom. 'Nom'tive Mouser! 'nough to make ye mad, sir!' he exclaimed with pathos. The wretch had been put to acquire a Latin declension.

Tom saw her on the morning she went away, he said: she was very sorrowful-looking, and nodded kindly to him as she passed in the fly along with young Tom Blaize. 'She have got uncommon kind eyes, sir,' said Tom, 'and cryin' don't spoil them.' For which his hand was wrenched.

Tom had no more to tell, save that, in rounding the road, the young lady had hung out her hand, and seemed to move it forward and back, as much as to say, Good-bye, Tom! 'And though she couldn't see me,' said Tom, 'I took off my hat. I did take it so kind of her to think of a chap like me.' He was at high-pressure sentiment—what with his education for a hero and his master's love-stricken state.

'You saw no more of her, Tom?'

'No, sir. That was the last!'

'That was the last you saw of her, Tom?'

'Well, sir, I saw nothin' more.'

'And so she went out of sight?'

'Clean gone, that she were, sir.'

'Why did they take her away? what have they done with her? where have they taken her to?'

These red-hot questionings were addressed to the universal heaven rather than to Tom.

'Why didn't she write?' they were resumed. 'Why did she leave? She 's mine. She belongs to me! Who dared take her away? Why did she leave without writing?——Tom!'

'Yes, sir,' said the well-drilled recruit, dressing himself up to the word of command. He expected a variation of the theme from the change of tone with which his name had been pronounced, but it was again: 'Where have they taken her to?' and this was even more perplexing to Tom than his hard sum in arithmetic had been. He could only draw down the corners of his mouth hard, and glance up queerly.

'She *had* been crying—you saw that, Tom?'

'No mistake about that, Mr. Richard. Cryin' all night and all day, I sh'd say.'

'And she was crying when you saw her?'

'She look'd as if she 'd just done for a moment, sir.'

'But her face was white?'

'White as a sheet.'

Richard paused to discover whether his instinct had caught a new view from these facts. He was in a cage, always knocking against the same bars, fly as he might. Her tears were the stars in his black night. He clung to them as golden orbs. Inexplicable as they were, they were at least pledges of love.

The hues of sunset had left the west. No light was there but the steadfast pale eye of twilight. Thither he was drawn. He mounted Cassandra, saying: 'Tell them something, Tom. I shan't be home to dinner,' and rode off toward the forsaken home of light over Belthorpe, wherein he saw the wan hand of his Lucy, waving farewell, receding as he advanced. His jewel was stolen—he must gaze upon the empty box.

CHAPTER XXIII

CRISIS IN THE APPLE DISEASE

NIGHT had come on as Richard entered the old elm-shaded, grass-bordered lane leading down from Raynham to Belthorpe. The pale eye of twilight was shut. The wind had tossed up the bank of western cloud, which was now flying broad and unlighted across the sky, broad and balmy—the charioted South-west at full charge behind his panting coursers. As he neared the farm his heart fluttered and leapt up. He was sure she must be there. She must have returned. Why should she have left for good without writing? He caught suspicion by the throat, making it voiceless, if it lived: he silenced reason. Her not writing was now a proof that she had returned. He listened to nothing but his imperious passion, and murmured sweet words for her, as if she were by: tender cherishing epithets of love in the nest. She was there—she moved somewhere about like a silver flame in the dear old house, doing her sweet household duties. His blood began to sing: oh, happy those within, to see her, and be about her! By some extraordinary process he contrived to cast a sort of glory round the burly person of Farmer Blaize himself. And oh! to have companionship with a seraph one must know a seraph's bliss, and was not young Tom to be envied? The smell of late clematis brought on the wind enwrapped him, and went to his brain, and threw a light over the old red-brick house, for he remembered where it grew, and the winter rose-tree, and the jessamine, and the passion-flower: the garden in front with the standard roses tended by her hands; the long wall to the left striped by the branches of the cherry, the peep of a further garden through the wall, and then the orchard, and the fields beyond—the happy circle of her dwelling! it flashed before his eyes while he looked on the darkness. And yet it was

the reverse of hope which kindled this light and inspired the momentary calm he experienced: it was despair exaggerating delusion, wilfully building up on a groundless basis. 'For the tenacity of true passion is terrible,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*: 'it will stand against the hosts of heaven, God's great array of facts, rather than surrender its aim, and must be crushed before it will succumb—sent to the lowest pit!' He knew she was not there; she was gone. But the power of a will strained to madness fought at it, kept it down, conjured forth her ghost, and would have it as he dictated. Poor youth! the great array of facts was in due order of march.

He had breathed her name many times, and once overloud; almost a cry for her escaped him. He had not noticed the opening of a door and the noise of a foot along the gravel walk. He was leaning over Cassandra's uneasy neck watching the one window intently, when a voice addressed him out of the darkness.

'Be that you, young gentleman?—Mr. Fev'rel?'

Richard's trance was broken. 'Mr. Blaize!' he said, recognizing the farmer's voice.

'Good even'n' t' you, sir,' returned the farmer. 'I knew the mare though I didn't know you. Rather bluff to-night it be. Will ye step in, Mr. Fev'rel? it 's beginnin' to spit—going to be a wildish night, I reckon.'

Richard dismounted. The farmer called one of his men to hold the mare, and ushered the young man in. Once there, Richard's conjurations ceased. There was a deadness about the rooms and passages that told of her absence. The walls he touched—these were the vacant shell of her. He had never been in the house since he knew her, and now what strange sweetness, and what pangs!

Young Tom Blaize was in the parlour, squared over the table in open-mouthed examination of an ancient book of the fashions for a summer month which had elapsed during his mother's minority. Young Tom was respectfully studying the aspects of the radiant beauties of the polite world. He also was a thrall of woman, newly enrolled, and full of wonder.

'What, Tom!' the farmer sang out as soon as he had

opened the door; 'there ye be! at yer folly agin, are ye? What good 'll them fashens do to you, I 'd like t' know? Come, shut up, and go and see to Mr. Fev'rel's mare. He 's al'ays at that ther' folly now. I say there never were a better name for a book than that ther' folly. Talk about attitudes!'

The farmer laughed his fat sides into a chair, and motioned his visitor to do likewise.

'It 's a comfort they 're most on 'em females,' he pursued, sounding a thwack on his knee as he settled himself agreeably in his seat. 'It don't matter much what they does, except pinchin' in — waspin' it — at the waist. Give me nature, I say—woman as she 's made! eh, young gentleman?'

'You seem very lonely here,' said Richard, glancing round, and at the ceiling.

'Lonely?' quoth the farmer. 'Well, for the matter o' that, we be—jest now, so 't happens; I 've got my pipe, and Tom 've got his folly. He 's on one side the table, and I 'm on t'other. He gaapes, and I gazes. We are a bit lonesome. But there—it 's *for* the best!'

Richard resumed: 'I hardly expected to see you to-night, Mr. Blaize.'

'Y' acted like a man in coming, young gentleman, and I does ye honour for it!' said Farmer Blaize with sudden energy and directness.

The thing implied by the farmer's words caused Richard to take a quick breath. They looked at each other, and looked away, the farmer thrumming on the arm of his chair.

Above the mantelpiece, surrounded by tarnished indifferent miniatures of high-collared, well-to-do yeomen of the anterior generation, trying their best not to grin, and high-waisted old ladies smiling an encouraging smile through plentiful cap-puckers, there hung a passably executed half-figure of a naval officer in uniform, grasping a telescope under his left arm, who stood forth clearly as not of their kith and kin. His eyes were blue, his hair light, his bearing that of a man who knows how to carry his head and shoulders. The artist, while giving him an epaulette to indicate his rank, had also recorded the

juvenility which a lieutenant in the naval service can retain after arriving at that position, by painting him with smooth cheeks and fresh ruddy lips. To this portrait Richard's eyes were directed. Farmer Blaize observed it, and said:

'Her father, sir!'

Richard moderated his voice to praise the likeness.

'Yes,' said the farmer, 'pretty well. Next best to havin' *her*, though it 's a long way off that!'

'An old family, Mr. Blaize—is it not?' Richard asked in as careless a tone as he could assume.

'Gentlefolks—what 's left of 'em,' replied the farmer with an equally affected indifference.

'And that 's her father?' said Richard, growing bolder to speak of her.

'That 's her father, young gentleman!'

'Mr. Blaize,' Richard turned to face him, and burst out, 'where is she?'

'Gone, sir! packed off! Can't have her here now.' The farmer thrummed a step brisker, and eyed the young man's wild face resolutely.

'Mr. Blaize,' Richard leaned forward to get closer to him. He was stunned, and hardly aware of what he was saying or doing: 'Where has she gone? Why did she leave?'

'You needn't to ask, sir—ye know,' said the farmer, with a side shot of his head.

'But *she* did not—it was not her wish to go?'

'No! I think she likes the place. Mayhap she likes 't too well!'

'Why did you send her away to make her unhappy, Mr. Blaize?'

The farmer bluntly denied it was he was the party who made her unhappy. 'Nobody can't accuse *me*. Tell ye what, sir. I wun't have the busybodies set to work about her, and there 's all the matter. So let you and I come to an understandin'.'

A blind inclination to take offence made Richard sit upright. He forgot it the next minute, and said humbly: 'Am I the cause of her going?'

'Well!' returned the farmer, 'to speak straight—ye be!'

'What can I do, Mr. Blaize, that she may come back again?' the young hypocrite asked.

'Now,' said the farmer, 'you 're coming to business. Glad to hear ye talk in that sensible way, Mr. Fev'rel. You may guess I wants her bad enough. The house ain't itself now she 's away, and I ain't myself. Well, sir! This ye can do. If you gives me your promise not to meddle with her at all—I can't mak' out how you come to be acquainted; not to try to get her to be meetin' you—and if you 'd 'a' seen her when she left, you would—when did ye meet—last grass, wasn't it?—your word as a gentleman not to be writing letters, and spyin' after her—I 'll have her back at once. Back she shall come!'

'Give her up!' cried Richard.

'Ay, that 's it!' said the farmer. 'Give her up.'

The young man checked the annihilation of time that was on his mouth.

'You sent her away to protect her from me, then?' he said savagely.

'That 's not quite it, but that 'll do,' rejoined the farmer.

'Do you think I shall harm her, sir?'

'People seem to think she 'll harm you, young gentleman,' the farmer said with some irony.

'Harm *me*—she? What people?'

'People pretty intimate with you, sir.'

'What people? Who spoke of us?' Richard began to scent a plot, and would not be balked.

'Well, sir, look here,' said the farmer. 'It ain't no secret, and if it be, I don't see why I 'm to keep it. It appears your education 's peculiar!' The farmer drawled out the word as if he were describing the figure of a snake. 'You ain't to be as other young gentlemen. All the better! You 're a fine bold young gentleman, and your father 's a right to be proud of ye. Well, sir—I 'm sure I thank him for 't—he comes to hear of you and Luce, and of course he don't want nothin' o' that—more do I. I meets him there! What 's more I won't have nothin' of it. She be my gal. She were left to my protection. And she 's a lady, sir. Let me tell ye, ye won't find many on 'em so

well looked to as she be—my Luce! Well, Mr. Fev'rel, it 's you, or it 's her—one of ye must be out o' the way. So we 're told. And Luce—I do believe she 's just as anxious about yer education as yer father—she says she 'll go, and wouldn't write, and 'd break it off for the sake o' your education. And she 've kep' her word, haven't she? She 's a true 'n. What she says she 'll do! True blue she be, my Luce! So now, sir, you do the same, and I 'll thank ye.'

Any one who has tossed a sheet of paper into the fire, and seen it gradually brown with heat and strike to flame, may conceive the mind of the lover as he listened to this speech.

His anger did not evaporate in words, but condensed and sank deep. 'Mr. Blaize,' he said, 'this is very kind of the people you allude to, but I am of an age now to think and act for myself—I love her, sir!' His whole countenance changed, and the muscles of his face quivered.

'Well,' said the farmer appeasingly, 'we all do at your age—somebody or other. It 's natural!'

'I love her!' the young man thundered afresh, too much possessed by his passion to have a sense of shame in the confession. 'Farmer!' his voice fell to supplication, 'will you bring her back?'

Farmer Blaize made a queer face. He asked—what for? and where was the promise required?—But was not the lover's argument conclusive? He said he loved her! and he could not see why her uncle should not in consequence immediately send for her, that they might be together. All very well, quoth the farmer, but what 's to come of it? What was to come of it?—Why, love, and more love! And a bit too much! the farmer added grimly.

'Then you refuse me, farmer,' said Richard. 'I must look to you for keeping her away from me, not to—to—these people. You will not have her back, though I tell you I love her better than my life?'

Farmer Blaize now had to answer him plainly, he had a reason and an objection of his own. And it was that her character was at stake, and God knew whether she

herself might not be in danger. He spoke with a kindly candour, not without dignity. He complimented Richard personally, but young people were young people; baronets' sons were not in the habit of marrying farmers' nieces.

At first the son of a System did not comprehend him. When he did, he said: 'Farmer! if I give you my word of honour, as I hope for heaven, to marry her when I am of age, will you have her back?'

He was so fervid that, to quiet him, the farmer only shook his head doubtfully at the bars of the grate, and let his chest fall slowly. Richard caught what seemed to him a glimpse of encouragement in these signs, and observed: 'It 's not because you object to me, Mr. Blaize?'

The farmer signified it was not that.

'It 's because my father is against me,' Richard went on, and undertook to show that love was so sacred a matter that no father could entirely and for ever resist his son's inclinations. Argument being a cool field where the farmer could meet and match him, the young man got on the tramroad of his passion, and went ahead. He drew pictures of Lucy, of her truth, and his own. He took leaps from life to death, from death to life, mixing imprecations and prayers in a torrent. Perhaps he did move the stolid old Englishman a little, he was so vehement, and made so visible a sacrifice of his pride.

Farmer Blaize tried to pacify him, but it was useless. His jewel he must have.

The farmer stretched out his hand for the pipe that allayeth botheration. 'May smoke heer now,' he said. 'Not when—somebody 's present. Smoke in the kitchen then. Don't mind smell?'

Richard nodded, and watched the operations while the farmer filled and lighted and began to puff, as if his fate hung on them.

'Who 'd 'a' thought, when you sat over there once, of its comin' to this?' ejaculated the famrer, drawing ease and reflection from tobacco. 'You didn't think much of her that day, young gentleman! I introduced ye. Well! things comes about. Can't you wait till she returns in due course, now?'

This suggestion, the work of the pipe, did but bring on him another torrent.

'It 's queer,' said the farmer, putting the mouth of the pipe to his wrinkled-up temples.

Richard waited for him, and then he laid down the pipe altogether, as no aid in perplexity, and said, after leaning his arm on the table and staring at Richard an instant:

'Look, young gentleman! My word 's gone. I 've spoke it. I 've given 'em the 'surance she shan't be back till the spring, and then I 'll have her, and then—well! I do hope, for more reasons than one, ye 'll both be wiser. I 've got my own notions about her. But I ain't the man to force a gal to marry 'gainst her inclines. Depend upon it I 'm not your enemy. Mr. Fev'rel. You 're jest the one to mak' a young gal proud. So wait—and see. That 's my 'dvice. Jest tak' and wait. I 've no more to say.'

Richard's impetuosity had made him really afraid of speaking his notions concerning the projected felicity of young Tom, if indeed they were serious.

The farmer repeated that he had no more to say; and Richard, with 'Wait till the spring! Wait till the spring!' dinning despair in his ears, stood up to depart. Farmer Blaize shook his slack hand in a friendly way, and called out at the door for young Tom, who, dreading allusions to his folly, did not appear. A maid rushed by Richard in the passage, and slipped something into his grasp, which fixed on it without further consciousness than that of touch. The mare was led forth by the Bantam. A light rain was falling down strong warm gusts, and the trees were noisy in the night. Farmer Blaize requested Richard at the gate to give him his hand, and say all was well. He liked the young man for his earnestness and honest outspeaking. Richard could not say all was well, but he gave his hand, and knitted it to the farmer's in a sharp squeeze, when he got upon Cassandra and rode into the tumult.

A calm, clear dawn succeeded the roaring west, and threw its glowing grey image on the waters of the abbey lake. Before sunrise Tom Bakewell was abroad, and met the missing youth, his master, jogging Cassandra leisurely

along the Lobourne Park road, a sorry couple to look at. Cassandra's flanks were caked with mud, her head drooped: all that was in her had been taken out by that wild night. On what heaths and heavy fallows had she not spent her noble strength, recklessly fretting through the darkness!

'Take the mare,' said Richard, dismounting and patting her between the eyes. 'She 's done up, poor old gal! Look to her, Tom, and then come to me in my room.'

Tom asked no questions.

Three days would bring the anniversary of Richard's birth, and though Tom was close, the condition of the mare and the young gentleman's strange freak in riding her out all night becoming known, prepared everybody at Raynham for the usual bad-luck birthday, the prophets of which were full of sad gratification. Sir Austin had an unpleasant office to require of his son; no other than that of humbly begging Benson's pardon, and washing out the undue blood he had spilt in taking his pound of flesh. Heavy Benson was told to anticipate the demand for pardon, and practised in his mind the most melancholy Christian deportment he could assume on the occasion. But while his son was in this state, Sir Austin considered that he would hardly be brought to see the virtues of the act, and did not make the requisition of him, and Heavy Benson remained drawn up solemnly expectant at door-ways, and at the foot of the staircase, a Saurian Caryatid, wherever he could get a step in advance of the young man, while Richard heedlessly passed him, as he passed everybody else, his head bent to the ground, and his legs bearing him like random instruments of whose service he was unconscious. It was a shock to Benson's implicit belief in his patron; and he was not consoled by the philosophic explanation: 'That good in a strong many-compounded nature is of slower growth than any other mortal thing, and must not be forced.' Damnatory doctrines best pleased Benson. He was ready to pardon, as a Christian should, but he did want his enemy before him on his knees. And now, though the Saurian eye saw more than all the other eyes in the house, and saw that there was matter in hand between Tom and his

master to breed exceeding discomposure to the System, Benson, as he had not received his indemnity, and did not wish to encounter fresh perils for nothing, held his peace.

Sir Austin partly divined what was going on in the breast of his son, without conceiving the depths of distrust his son cherished or quite measuring the intensity of the passion that consumed him. He was very kind and tender with him. Like a cunning physician who has, nevertheless, overlooked the change in the disease superinduced by one false dose, he meditated his prescriptions carefully and confidently, sure that he knew the case and was a match for it. He decreed that Richard's erratic behaviour should pass unnoticed. Two days before the birthday, he asked him whether he would object to having company. To which Richard said: 'Have whom you will, sir.' The preparation for festivity commenced accordingly.

On the birthday eve he dined with the rest. Lady Blandish was there, and sat penitently at his right. Hippias prognosticated certain indigestion for himself on the morrow. The Eighteenth Century wondered whether she should live to see another birthday. Adrian drank the two-years' distant term of his tutorship, and Algernon went over the list of the Lobourne men who would cope with Bursley on the morrow. Sir Austin gave ear and a word to all, keeping his mental eye for his son. To please Lady Blandish also, Adrian ventured to make trifling jokes about London's Mrs. Grandison; jokes delicately not decent, but so delicately so, that it was not decent to perceive it.

After dinner Richard left them. Nothing more than commonly peculiar was observed about him, beyond the excessive glitter of his eyes, but the baronet said: 'Yes, yes! that will pass.' He and Adrian, and Lady Blandish, took tea in the library, and sat till a late hour discussing casuistries relating mostly to the apple disease. Concerse very amusing to the wise youth, who could suggest to the two chaste minds situations of the shadiest character, with the air of a seeker after truth, and lead them, unsuspecting, where they dared not look about them. The

aphorist had elated the heart of his constant fair worshipper with a newly rounded, if not newly conceived sentence, when they became aware that they were four. Heavy Benson stood among them. He said he had knocked but received no answer. There was, however, a vestige of surprise and dissatisfaction on his face beholding Adrian of the company, which had not quite worn away, and gave place, when it did vanish, to an aspect of flabby severity.

'Well, Benson, well?' said the baronet.

The unmoving man replied: 'If you please, Sir Austin—Mr. Richard!'

'Well?'

'He 's out!'

'Well?'

'With Bakewell!'

'Well?'

'And a carpet-bag!'

Adrian raised his brows. The carpet-bag might be supposed to contain that funny thing called a young hero's romance in the making.

Out Richard was, and with a carpet-bag, which Tom Bakewell carried. He was on the road to Bellingham under heavy rain, hasting like an escaped captive, wild with joy, while Tom shook his skin and grunted at his discomforts. The mail train was to be caught at Bellingham. He knew where to find her now, through the intervention of Miss Davenport, and thither he was flying, an arrow loosed from the bow: thither, in spite of fathers and friends and plotters, to claim her, and take her, and stand with her against the world.

They were both thoroughly wet when they entered Bellingham, and Tom's visions were of hot drinks. He hinted the necessity for inward consolation to his master, who could answer nothing but 'Tom! Tom! I shall see her to-morrow!' It was bad—travelling in the wet, Tom hinted again, to provoke the same insane outcry, and have his arm seized and furiously shaken into the bargain. Passing the principal inn of the place, Tom spoke plainly for brandy.

'No!' cried Richard, 'there 's not a moment to be lost!' and as he said it, he reeled and fell against Tom, muttering indistinctly of faintness, and that there was no time to lose. Tom lifted him in his arms, and got admission to the inn. Brandy, the country's specific, was advised by host and hostess, and forced into his mouth, reviving him sufficiently to cry out: 'Tom! the bell 's ringing: we shall be late,' after which he fell back insensible on the sofa where they had stretched him. Excitement of blood and brain had done its work upon him. The youth suffered them to undress him and put him to bed, and there he lay, forgetful even of love; a drowned weed borne onward by the tide of the hours. There his father found him.

Was the scientific humanist remorseful? He had looked forward to such a crisis as that point in the disease his son was the victim of, when the body would fail and give the spirit calm to conquer the malady, knowing very well that the seeds of the evil were not of the spirit. Moreover, to see him and have him was a repose after the alarm Benson had sounded. 'Mark!' he said to Lady Blandish, 'when he recovers he will not care for her.'

The lady had accompanied him to the Bellingham inn on first hearing of Richard's seizure.

'What an iron man you can be,' she exclaimed, smothering her intuitions. She was for giving the boy his bauble; promising it him, at least, if he would only get well and be the bright flower of promise he once was.

'Can you look on him,' she pleaded, 'can you look on him and persevere?'

It was a hard sight for this man who loved his son so deeply. The youth lay in his strange bed, straight and motionless, with fever on his cheeks and altered eyes.

Old Dr. Clifford of Lobourne was the medical attendant, who, with head-shaking, and gathering of lips, and reminiscences of ancient arguments, guaranteed to do all that leech could do in the matter. The old doctor did admit that Richard's constitution was admirable, and answered to his prescriptions like a piano to the musician. 'But,' he said at a family consultation, for Sir Austin had told him how it stood with the young man, 'drugs are not

much in cases of this sort. Change! That 's what 's wanted, and as soon as may be. Distraction! He ought to see the world, and know what he is made of. It 's no use my talking, I know,' added the doctor.

'On the contrary,' said Sir Austin, 'I am quite of your persuasion. And the world he shall see—now.'

'We have dipped him in Styx, you know, doctor,' Adrian remarked.

'But, doctor,' said Lady Blandish, 'have you known a case of this sort before?'

'Never, my lady,' said the doctor, 'they 're not common in these parts. Country people are tolerably healthy-minded.'

'But people—and country people—have died for love, doctor?'

The doctor had not met any of them.

'Men or women?' inquired the baronet.

Lady Blandish believed mostly women.

'Ask the doctor whether they were healthy-minded women,' said the baronet. 'No, you are both looking at the wrong end. Between a highly-cultured being, and an emotionless animal, there is all the difference in the world. But of the two, the doctor is nearer the truth. The healthy nature is pretty safe. If he allowed for organization he would be right altogether. To feel, but not to feel to excess, that is the problem.'

> 'If I can't have the one I chose,
> To some fresh maid I will propose.'

Adrian hummed a country ballad.

CHAPTER XXIV

OF THE SPRING PRIMROSE AND THE AUTUMNAL

When the young Experiment again knew the hours that rolled him onward, he was in his own room at Raynham, Nothing had changed: only a strong fist had knocked him down and stunned him, and he opened his eyes to a grey world: he had forgotten what he lived for. He was weak and thin, and with a pale memory of things. His functions were the same, everything surrounding him was the same: he looked upon the old blue hills, the far-lying fallows, the river, and the woods: he knew them, they seemed to have lost recollection of him. Nor could he find in familiar human faces the secret of intimacy of heretofore. They were the same faces: they nodded and smiled to him. What was lost he could not tell. Something had been knocked out of him! He was sensible of his father's sweetness of manner, and he was grieved that he could not reply to it, for every sense of shame and reproach had strangely gone. He felt very useless. In place of the fiery love for one, he now bore about a cold charity to all.

Thus in the heart of the young man died the spring primrose, and while it died another heart was pushing forth the primrose of autumn.

The wonderful change in Richard, and the wisdom of her admirer, now positively proved, were exciting matters to Lady Blandish. She was rebuked for certain little rebellious fancies concerning him that had come across her enslaved mind from time to time. For was he not almost a prophet? It distressed the sentimental lady that a love like Richard's could pass off in mere smoke, and words such as she had heard him speak in Abbey Wood resolve to emptiness. Nay, it humiliated her personally, and the baronet's shrewd prognostication humiliated her. For how should he know and dare to say, that love was

a thing of the dust that could be trodden out under the heel of science? But he had said so, and he had proved himself right. She heard with wonderment that Richard of his own accord had spoken to his father of the folly he had been guilty of, and had begged his pardon. The baronet told her this, adding that the youth had done it in a cold unwavering way, without a movement of his features: had evidently done it to throw off the burden of the duty he had conceived. He had thought himself bound to acknowledge that he had been the Foolish Young Fellow, wishing, possibly, to abjure the fact by an act of penance. He had also given satisfaction to Benson, and was become a renovated peaceful spirit, whose main object appeared to be to get up his physical strength by exercise and no expenditure of speech.

In her company he was composed and courteous; even when they were alone together he did not exhibit a trace of melancholy. Sober he seemed, as one who has recovered from a drunkenness and has determined to drink no more. The idea struck her that he might be playing a part, but Tom Bakewell, in a private conversation they had, informed her that he had received an order from his young master, one day while boxing with him, not to mention the young lady's name to him as long as he lived; and Tom could only suppose that she had offended him. Theoretically wise Lady Blandish had always thought the baronet; she was unprepared to find him thus practically sagacious. She fell many degrees; she wanted something to cling to; so she clung to the man who struck her low. Love, then, was earthly; its depth could be probed by science! A man lived who could measure it from end to end; foretell its term; handle the young cherub as were he a shot owl! We who have flown into cousinship with the empyrean, and disported among immortal hosts, our base birth as a child of Time is made bare to us—our wings are cut! Oh, then, if science is this victorious enemy of love, let us love science! was the logic of the lady's heart; and secretly cherishing the assurance that she should confute him yet, and prove him utterly wrong, she gave him the fruits of present success, as it is a habit of women to do;

involuntarily partly. The fires took hold of her. She felt soft emotions such as a girl feels, and they flattered her. It was like youth coming back. Pure women have a second youth. The autumn primrose flourished.

We are advised by *The Pilgrim's Scrip* that:

'The ways of women, which are Involution, and their practices, which are Opposition, are generally best hit upon by guess work, and a bold word';—it being impossible to track them and hunt them down in the ordinary style.

So that we may not ourselves become involved and opposed, let us each of us venture a guess and say a bold word as to how it came that the lady, who trusted love to be eternal, grovelled to him that shattered her tender faith, and loved him.

Hitherto it had been simply a sentimental dalliance, and gossips had maligned the lady. Just when the gossips grew tired of their slander, and inclined to look upon her charitably, she set about to deserve every word they had said of her; which may instruct us, if you please, that gossips have only to persist in lying to be crowned with verity, or that one has only to endure evil mouths for a period to gain impunity. She was always at the abbey now. She was much closeted with the baronet. It seemed to be understood that she had taken Mrs. Doria's place. Benson in his misogynic soul perceived that she was taking Lady Feverel's: but any report circulated by Benson was sure to meet discredit, and drew the gossips upon himself; which made his meditations tragic. No sooner was one woman defeated than another took the field! The object of the System was no sooner safe than its great author was in danger!

'I can't think what has come to Benson,' he said to Adrian.

'He seems to have received a fresh legacy of several pounds of lead,' returned the wise youth, and imitating Dr. Clifford's manner: 'Change is what he wants! distraction! send him to Wales for a month, sir, and let Richard go with him. The two victims of woman may do each other good.'

'Unfortunately I can't do without him,' said the baronet.

'Then we must continue to have him on our shoulders all day, and on our chests all night!' Adrian ejaculated.

'I think while he preserves this aspect we won't have him at the dinner-table,' said the baronet.

Adrian thought that would be a relief to their digestions; and added: 'You know, sir, what he says?'

Receiving a negative, Adrian delicately explained to him that Benson's excessive ponderosity of demeanour was caused by anxiety for the safety of his master.

'You must pardon a faithful fool, sir,' he continued, for the baronet became red, and exclaimed:

'His stupidity is past belief! I have absolutely to bolt my study-door against him.'

Adrian at once beheld a charming scene in the interior of the study, not unlike one that Benson had visually witnessed. For, like a wary prophet, Benson, that he might have warrant for what he foretold of the future, had a care to spy upon the present: warned haply by *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, of which he was a diligent reader, and which says, rather emphatically: 'Could we see Time's full face, we were wise of him.' Now to see Time's full face, it is sometimes necessary to look through keyholes, the veteran having a trick of smiling peace to you on one cheek and grimacing confusion on the other behind the curtain. Decency and a sense of honour restrain most of us from being thus wise and miserable for ever. Benson's excuse was that he believed in his master, who was menaced. And moreover, notwithstanding his previous tribulation, to spy upon Cupid was sweet to him. So he peeped, and he saw a sight. He saw Time's full face; or, in other words, he saw the wiles of woman and the weakness of man: which is our history as Benson would have written it, and a great many poets and philosophers have written it.

Yet it was but the plucking of the autumn primrose that Benson had seen: a somewhat different operation from the plucking of the spring one: very innocent! Our staid elderly sister has paler blood, and has, or thinks she has, a reason or two about the roots. She is not all instinct. 'For this high cause, and for that I know men, and know him to be the flower of men, I give myself to

him!' She makes that lofty inward exclamation while the hand is detaching her from the roots. Even so strong a self-justification she requires. She has not that blind glory in excess which her young sister can gild the longest leap with. And if, moth-like, she desires the star, she is nervously cautious of candles. Hence her circles about the dangerous human flame are wide and shy. She must be drawn nearer and nearer by a fresh *reason*. She loves to sentimentalize. Lady Blandish had been sentimentalizing for ten years. She would have preferred to pursue the game. The dark-eyed dame was pleased with her smooth life and the soft excitement that did not ruffle it. Not willingly did she let herself be won.

'Sentimentalists,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, 'are they who seek to enjoy without incurring the immense debtorship for a thing done.'

'It is,' the writer says of sentimentalism elsewhere, 'a happy pastime and an important science to the timid, the idle, and the heartless; but a damning one to them who have anything to forfeit.'

However, one who could set down the dying for love, as a sentimentalism, can hardly be accepted as a clear authority. Assuredly he was not one to avoid the incurring of the immense debtorship in any way: but he was a bondman still to the woman who had forsaken him, and a spoken word would have made it seem his duty to face that public scandal which was the last evil to him. What had so horrified the virtuous Benson, Richard had already beheld in Daphne's Bower; a simple kissing of the fair white hand! Doubtless the keyhole somehow added to Benson's horror. The two similar performances, so very innocent, had wondrous opposite consequences. The first kindled Richard to adore woman; the second destroyed Benson's faith in man. But Lady Blandish knew the difference between the two. She understood why the baronet did not speak; excused, and respected him for it. She was content, since she must love, to love humbly, and she had, besides, her pity for his sorrows to comfort her. A hundred fresh reasons for loving him arose and multiplied every day. He read to her the secret book in his own

handwriting, composed for Richard's marriage guide: containing advice and directions to a young husband, full of the most tender wisdom and delicacy, so she thought; nay, not wanting in poetry, though neither rhymed nor measured. He expounded to her the distinctive character of the divers ages of love, giving the palm to the flower she put forth, over that of spring, or the summer rose. And while they sat and talked: 'My wound has healed,' he said. 'How?' she asked. 'At the fountain of your eyes,' he replied, and drew the joy of new life from her blushes, without incurring further debtorship for a thing done.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH THE HERO TAKES A STEP

Let it be some apology for the damage caused by the careering hero, and a consolation to the quiet wretches, dragged along with him at his chariot-wheels, that he is generally the last to know when he has made an actual start; such a mere creature is he, like the rest of us, albeit the head of our fates. By this you perceive the true hero, whether he be a prince or a pot-boy, that he does not plot; Fortune does all for him. He may be compared to one to whom, in an electric circle, it is given to carry the *battery*. We caper and grimace at his will; yet not his the will, not his the power. 'Tis all Fortune's, whose puppet he is. She deals her dispensations through him. Yea, though our capers be never so comical, he laughs not. Intent upon his own business, the true hero asks little services of us here and there; thinks it quite natural that they should be acceded to, and sees nothing ridiculous in the lamentable contortions we must go through to fulfil them. Probably he is the elect of Fortune, because of that notable faculty of being intent upon his own business: 'Which is,' says *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, 'with men to be valued equal to that force which in water *makes a stream*.' This prelude was necessary to the present chapter of Richard's history.

It happened that in the turn of the year, and while old earth was busy with her flowers, the fresh wind blew, the little bird sang, and Hippias Feverel, the Dyspepsy, amazed, felt the spring move within him. He communicated his delightful new sensations to the baronet, his brother, whose constant exclamation with regard to him was: 'Poor Hippias! All his machinery is bare!' and had no hope that he would ever be in a condition to defend it from view. Nevertheless Hippias had that hope,

and so he told his brother, making great exposure of his machinery to effect the explanation. He spoke of all his physical experiences exultingly, and with wonder. The achievement of common efforts, not usually blazoned, he celebrated as triumphs, and, of course, had Adrian on his back very quickly. But he could bear him, or anything, now. It was such ineffable relief to find himself looking out upon the world of mortals instead of into the black phantasmal abysses of his own complicated frightful structure. 'My mind doesn't so much seem to haunt itself, now,' said Hippias, nodding shortly and peering out of intense puckers to convey a glimpse of what hellish sufferings his had been: 'I feel as if I had come above-ground.'

A poor Dyspepsy may talk as he will, but he is the one who never gets sympathy, or experiences compassion: and it is he whose groaning petitions for charity do at last rout that Christian virtue. Lady Blandish, a charitable soul, could not listen to Hippias, though she had a heart for little mice and flies, and Sir Austin had also small patience with his brother's gleam of health, which was just enough to make his disease visible. He remembered his early follies and excesses, and bent his ear to him as one man does to another who complains of having to pay a debt legally incurred.

'I think,' said Adrian, seeing how the communications of Hippias were received, 'that when our Nemesis takes lodgings in the stomach, it 's best to act the Spartan, smile hard, and be silent.'

Richard alone was decently kind to Hippias; whether from opposition or real affection, could not be said, as the young man was mysterious. He advised his uncle to take exercise, walked with him, cultivated cheerful impressions in him, and pointed out innocent pursuits. He made Hippias visit with him some of the poor old folk of the village, who bewailed the loss of his cousin Austin Wentworth, and did his best to waken him up, and give the outer world a stronger hold on him. He succeeded in nothing but in winning his uncle's gratitude. The season bloomed scarce longer than a week for Hippias, and then

began to languish. The poor Dyspepsy's eager grasp at beatification relaxed: he went underground again. He announced that he felt 'spongy things'—one of the more constant throes of his malady. His bitter face recurred: he chewed the cud of horrid hallucinations. He told Richard he must give up going about with him: people telling of their ailments made him so uncomfortable—the birds were so noisy, pairing—the rude bare soil sickened him.

Richard treated him with a gravity equal to his father's. He asked what the doctors said.

'Oh, the doctors!' cried Hippias with vehement scepticism. 'No man of sense believes in medicine for chronic disorder. Do you happen to have heard of any new remedy then, Richard? No? They advertise a great many cures for indigestion, I assure you, my dear boy. I wonder whether one can rely upon the authenticity of those signatures? I see no reason why there should be *no* cure for such a disease—eh? And it 's just one of the things a quack, as they call them, would hit upon sooner than one who is in the beaten track. Do you know, Richard, my dear boy, I 've often thought that if we could by any means appropriate to our use some of the extraordinary digestive power that a boa constrictor has in his gastric juices, there is really no manner of reason why we should not comfortably dispose of as much of an ox as our stomachs will hold, and one might eat French dishes without the wretchedness of thinking what 's to follow. And this makes me think that those fellows *may*, after all, have got some truth in them: some secret that, of course, they require to be paid for. We distrust each other in this world too much, Richard. I 've felt inclined once or twice —but it 's absurd! If it only alleviated a few of my sufferings *I* should be satisfied. I 've no hesitation in saying that I should be quite satisfied if it only did away with one or two, and left me free to eat and drink as other people do. Not that I mean to try them. It 's only a fancy—eh? What a thing health is, my dear boy! Ah! if I were like you! I was in love once!'

'Were you!' said Richard, coolly regarding him.

'I 've forgotten what I felt!' Hippias sighed. 'You 've very much improved, my dear boy.'

'So people say,' quoth Richard.

Hippias looked at him anxiously: 'If I go to town and get the doctor's opinion about trying a new course—eh, Richard, will you come with me? I should like your company. We could see London together, you know. Enjoy ourselves,' and Hippias rubbed his hands.

Richard smiled at the feeble glimmer of enjoyment promised by his uncle's eyes, and said he thought it better they should stay where they were—an answer that might mean anything. Hippias immediately became possessed by the beguiling project. He went to the baronet, and put the matter before him, instancing doctors as the object of his journey, not quacks, of course; and requesting leave to take Richard. Sir Austin was getting uneasy about his son's manner. It was not natural. His heart seemed to be frozen: he had no confidences: he appeared to have no ambition—to have lost the virtues of youth with the poison that had passed out of him. He was disposed to try what effect a little travelling might have on him, and had himself once or twice hinted to Richard that it would be good for him to move about, the young man quietly replying that he did not wish to quit Raynham at all, which was too strict a fulfilment of his father's original views in educating him there entirely. On the day that Hippias made his proposal, Adrian, seconded by Lady Blandish, also made one. The sweet spring season stirred in Adrian as well as in others: not to pastoral measures: to the joys of the operatic world and bravura glories. He also suggested that it would be advisable to carry Richard to town for a term, and let him know his position, and some freedom. Sir Austin weighed the two proposals. He was pretty certain that Richard's passion was consumed, and that the youth was now only under the burden of its ashes. He had found against his heart, at the Bellingham Inn, a great lock of golden hair. He had taken it, and the lover, after feeling about for it with faint hands, never asked for it. This precious lock (Miss Davenport had thrust it into his hand at Belthorpe as Lucy's last gift), what sighs and

tears it had weathered! The baronet laid it in Richard's sight one day, and beheld him take it up, turn it over, and drop it down again calmly, as if he were handling any common curiosity. It pacified him on that score. The young man's love was dead. Dr. Clifford said rightly: he wanted distractions. The baronet determined that Richard should go. Hippias and Adrian then pressed their several suits as to which should have him. Hippias, when he could forget himself, did not lack sense. He observed that Adrian was not at present a proper companion for Richard, and would teach him to look on life from the false point.

'You don't understand a young philosopher,' said the baronet.

'A young philosopher 's an old fool!' returned Hippias, not thinking that his growl had begotten a phrase.

His brother smiled with gratification, and applauded him loudly: 'Excellent! worthy of your best days! You 're wrong, though, in applying it to Adrian. He has never been precocious. All he has done has been to bring sound common sense to bear upon what he hears and sees. I think, however,' the baronet added, 'he may want faith in the better qualities of men.' And this reflection inclined him not to let his son be alone with Adrian. He gave Richard his choice, who saw which way his father's wishes tended, and decided so to please him. Naturally it annoyed Adrian extremely. He said to his chief:

'I suppose you know what you are doing, sir. I don't see that we derive any advantage from the family name being made notorious for twenty years of obscene suffering, and becoming a byword for our constitutional tendency to stomachic distension before we fortunately encountered Quackem's Pill. My uncle's tortures have been huge, but I would rather society were not intimate with them under their several headings.' Adrian enumerated some of the most abhorrent. 'You know him, sir. If he conceives a duty, he will do it in the face of every decency—all the more obstinate because the conception is rare. If he feels a little brisk the morning after the pill, he sends the letter that makes us famous! We go down to posterity with heightened characteristics, to say nothing of a con-

temporary celebrity nothing less than our being turned inside-out to the rabble. I confess I don't desire to have my machinery made bare to them.'

Sir Austin assured the wise youth that Hippias had arranged to go to Dr. Bairam. He softened Adrian's chagrin by telling him that in about two weeks they would follow to London: hinting also at a prospective summer campaign. The day was fixed for Richard to depart, and the day came. Madame the Eighteenth Century called him to her chamber and put into his hand a fifty-pound note, as her contribution toward his pocket expenses. He did not want it, he said, but she told him he was a young man, and would soon make that fly when he stood on his own feet. The old lady did not at all approve of the System in her heart, and she gave her grand-nephew to understand that, should he require more, he knew where to apply, and secrets would be kept. His father presented him with a hundred pounds—which also Richard said he did not want—he did not care for money. 'Spend it or not,' said the baronet, perfectly secure in him.

Hippias had few injunctions to observe. They were to take up quarters at the hotel, Algernon's general run of company at the house not being altogether wholesome. The baronet particularly forewarned Hippias of the imprudence of attempting to restrict the young man's movements, and letting him imagine he was under surveillance. Richard having been, as it were, pollarded by despotism, was now to grow up straight and bloom again, in complete independence, as far as he could feel. So did the sage decree; and we may pause a moment to reflect how wise were his previsions, and how successful they must have been, had not Fortune, the great foe to human cleverness, turned against him, or he against himself.

The departure took place on a fine March morning. The bird of winter sang from the budding tree; in the blue sky sang the bird of summer. Adrian rode between Richard and Hippias to the Bellingham station, and vented his disgust on them after his own humorous fashion, because it did not rain and damp their ardour. In the

rear came Lady Blandish and the baronet, conversing on the calm summit of success.

'You have shaped him exactly to resemble yourself,' she said, pointing with her riding-whip to the grave stately figure of the young man.

'Outwardly, perhaps,' he answered, and led to a discussion on purity and strength, the lady saying that she preferred purity.

'But you do not,' said the baronet. 'And there I admire the always true instinct of women, that they *all* worship strength in whatever form, and seem to know it to be the child of heaven; whereas purity is but a characteristic, a garment, and can be spotted—how soon! For there are questions in this life with which we must grapple or be lost, and when hunted by that cold eye of intense inner-consciousness, the clearest soul becomes a cunning fox, if it have not courage to stand and do battle. Strength indicates a boundless nature—like the Maker. Strength is a God to you—purity a toy. A pretty one, and you seem to be fond of playing with it,' he added with unaccustomed slyness.

The lady listened, pleased at the sportive malice which showed that the constraint on his mind had left him. It was for women to fight their fight now; she only took part in it for amusement. This is how the ranks of our enemies are thinned; no sooner do poor woman put up a champion in their midst than she betrays them.

'I see,' she said archly, 'we are the lovelier vessels; you claim the more direct descent. Men are seedlings: women —slips! Nay, you have said so,' she cried out at his gestured protestations, laughing.

'But I never printed it.'

'Oh! what you speak answers for print with me.'

Exquisite Blandish! He could not choose but love her.

'Tell me what are your plans?' she asked. 'May a woman know?'

He replied: 'I have none or you would share them. I shall study him in the world. This indifference must wear off. I shall mark his inclinations now, and he shall be what he inclines to. Occupation will be his prime

safety. His cousin Austin's plan of life appears most to his taste, and he can serve the people that way as well as in Parliament, should he have no stronger ambition. The clear duty of a man of any wealth is to serve the people as he best can. He shall go among Austin's set, if he wishes it, though personally I find no pleasure in rash imaginations, and undigested schemes built upon the mere instinct of principles.'

'Look at him now,' said the lady. 'He seems to care for nothing; not even for the beauty of the day.'

'Or Adrian's jokes,' added the baronet.

Adrian could be seen to be trying zealously to torment a laugh, or a confession of irritation, out of his hearers, stretching out his chin to one and to the other, with audible asides. Richard he treated as a new instrument of destruction about to be let loose on the slumbering metropolis; Hippias as one in an interesting condition; and he got so much fun out of the notion of these two journeying together, and the mishaps that might occur to them, that he esteemed it almost a personal insult for his hearers not to laugh. The wise youth's dull life at Raynham had afflicted him with many peculiarities of the professional joker.

'Oh! the spring! the spring!' he cried, as in scorn of his sallies they exchanged their unmeaning remarks on the sweet weather across him. 'You seem both to be uncommonly excited by the operations of turtles, rooks, and daws. Why can't you let them alone?

'Wind bloweth,
Cock croweth,
Doodle-doo;
Hippy verteth,
Ricky sterteth,
Sing cuckoo!

There 's an old native pastoral! Why don't you write a spring sonnet, Ricky? The asparagus-beds are full of promise, I hear, and eke the strawberry. Berries, I fancy, your Pegasus has a taste for. What kind of berry was that I saw some verses of yours about once—amatory verses to some kind of berry—yewberry, blueberry, glue-

berry? Pretty verses, decidedly warm. Lips, eyes, bosom, legs—legs? I don't think you gave her any legs. No legs and no nose. That appears to be the poetic taste of the day. It shall be admitted that you create the very beauties for a chaste people.

'Oh might I lie where leans her lute!

and offend no moral community. That 's not a bad image of yours, my dear boy:

'Her shape is like an antelope
Upon the Eastern hills.

But as a candid critic, I would ask you if the likeness can be considered correct when you give her no legs? You will see at the ballet that you are in error about women at present, Richard. That admirable institution which our venerable elders have imported from Gallia for the instruction of our gaping youth, will edify and astonish you. I assure you I used, from reading *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, to imagine all sorts of things about them, till I was taken there, and learnt that they are very like us after all, and then they ceased to trouble me. Mystery is the great danger to youth, my son! Mystery is woman's redoubtable weapon, O Richard of the Ordeal! I 'm aware that you 've had your lessons in anatomy, but nothing will persuade you that an anatomical figure means flesh and blood. You can't realize the fact. Do you intend to publish when you 're in town? It 'll be better not to put your name. Having one's name to a volume of poems is as bad as to an advertising pill.'

'I will send you an early copy, Adrian, when I publish,' quoth Richard. 'Hark at that old blackbird, uncle.'

'Yes,' Hippias quavered, looking up from the usual subject of his contemplation, and trying to take an interest in him, 'fine old fellow!'

'What a chuckle he gives out before he flies! Not unlike July nightingales. You know that bird I told you of—the blackbird that had its mate shot, and used to come to sing to old Dame Bakewell's bird from the tree opposite. A rascal knocked it over the day before yesterday, and the dame says her bird hasn't sung a note since.'

'Extraordinary!' Hippias muttered abstractedly. 'I remember the verses.'

'But where 's your moral?' interposed the wrathful Adrian. 'Where 's constancy rewarded?

'The ouzel-cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill;
The rascal with his aim so true;
The poet's little quill!

Where 's the moral of that, except that all 's game to the poet? Certainly we have a noble example of the devotedness of the female, who for three entire days refuses to make herself heard, on account of a defunct male. I suppose that 's what Ricky dwells on.'

'As you please, my dear Adrian,' says Richard, and points out larch-buds to his uncle, as they ride by the young green wood.

The wise youth was driven to extremity. Such a lapse from his pupil's heroics to this last verge of Arcadian coolness, Adrian could not believe in. 'Hark at this old blackbird!' he cried, in his turn, and pretending to interpret his fits of song:

'Oh, what a pretty comedy! Don't we wear the mask well, my Fiesco? Genoa will be our own to-morrow! Only wait until the train has started—jolly! jolly! jolly! We 'll be winners yet!

'Not a bad verse—eh, Ricky? my Lucius Junius!'

'You do the blackbird well,' said Richard, and looked at him in a manner mildly affable.

Adrian shrugged. 'You 're a young man of wonderful powers,' he emphatically observed; meaning to say that Richard quite beat him; for which opinion Richard gravely thanked him, and with this they rode into Bellingham.

There was young Tom Blaize at the station, in his Sunday beaver and gala waistcoat and neckcloth, coming the lord over Tom Bakewell, who had preceded his master in charge of the baggage. He likewise was bound for London. Richard, as he was dismounting, heard Adrian say to the baronet: 'The Beast, sir, appears to be going to fetch Beauty'; but he paid no heed to the words. Whether young Tom heard them or not, Adrian's look took the lord

out of him, and he shrunk away into obscurity, where the nearest approach to the fashions which the tailors of Bellingham could supply to him, sat upon him more easily, and he was not stiffened by the eyes of the superiors whom he sought to rival. The baronet, Lady Blandish, and Adrian remained on horseback, and received Richard's adieux across the palings. He shook hands with each of them in the same kindly cold way, eliciting from Adrian a marked encomium on his style of doing it. The train came up, and Richard stepped after his uncle into one of the carriages.

Now surely there will come an age when the presentation of science at war with Fortune and the Fates, will be deemed the true epic of modern life; and the aspect of a scientific humanist who, by dint of incessant watchfulness, has maintained a System against those active forces, cannot be reckoned less than sublime, even though at the moment he but sit upon his horse, on a fine March morning such as this, and smile wistfully to behold the son of his heart, his System incarnate, wave a serene adieu to tutelage, neither too eager nor morbidly unwilling to try his luck alone for a term of two weeks. At present, I am aware, an audience impatient for blood and glory scorns the stress I am putting on incidents so minute, a picture so little imposing. An audience will come to whom it will be given to see the elementary machinery at work: who, as it were, from some slight hint of the straws, will feel the winds of March when they do not blow. To them will nothing be trivial, seeing that they will have in their eyes the invisible conflict going on around us, whose features a nod, a smile, a laugh of ours perpetually changes. And they will perceive, moreover, that in real life all hangs together: the train is laid in the lifting of an eyebrow, that bursts upon the field of thousands. They will see the links of things as they pass, and wonder not, as foolish people now do, that this great matter came out of that small one.

Such an audience, then, will participate in the baronet's gratification at his son's demeanour, wherein he noted

the calm bearing of experience not gained in the usual wanton way: and will not be without some excited apprehension at his twinge of astonishment, when, just as the train went sliding into swiftness, he beheld the grave, cold, self-possessed young man throw himself back in the carriage violently laughing. Science was at a loss to account for that. Sir Austin checked his mind from inquiring, that he might keep suspicion at a distance, but he thought it odd, and the jarring sensation that ran along his nerves at the sight, remained with him as he rode home.

Lady Blandish's tender womanly intuition bade her say: 'You see it was the very thing he wanted. He has got his natural spirits already.'

'It was,' Adrian put in his word, 'the exact thing he wanted. His spirits have returned miraculously.'

'Something amused him,' said the baronet, with an eye on the puffing train.

'Probably something his uncle said or did,' Lady Blandish suggested, and led off at a gallop.

Her conjecture chanced to be quite correct. The cause for Richard's laughter was simple enough. Hippias, on finding the carriage-door closed on him, became all at once aware of the bright-haired hope which dwells in change, for one who does not woo her too frequently; and to express his sudden relief from mental despondency at the amorous prospect, the Dyspepsy bent and gave his hands a sharp rub between his legs: which unlucky action brought Adrian's pastoral,

Hippy verteth,
Sing cuckoo!

in such comic colours before Richard, that a demon of laughter seized him.

Hippy verteth!

Every time he glanced at his uncle the song sprang up, and he laughed so immoderately that it looked like madness come upon him.

'Why, why, why, what are you laughing at, my dear boy?' said Hippias, and was provoked by the contagious exercise to a modest 'ha! ha!'

'Why, what are *you* laughing at, uncle?' cried Richard.

'I really don't know,' Hippias chuckled.

'Nor I, uncle! Sing, cuckoo!'

They laughed themselves into the pleasantest mood imaginable. Hippias not only came above ground, he flew about in the very skies, *verting* like any blithe creature of the season. He remembered old legal jokes, and anecdotes of circuit; and Richard laughed at them all, but more at him—he was so genial, and childishly fresh, and innocently joyful at his own transformation, while a lurking doubt in the bottom of his eyes, now and then, that it might not last, and that he must go underground again, lent him a look of pathos and humour which tickled his youthful companion irresistibly and made his heart warm to him.

'I tell you what, uncle,' said Richard, 'I think travelling 's a capital thing.'

'The best thing in the world, my dear boy,' Hippias returned. 'It makes me wish I had given up that work of mine, and tried it before, instead of chaining myself to a task. We 're quite different beings in a minute. I am. Hem! what shall we have for dinner?'

'Leave that to me, uncle. I shall order for you. You know, I intend to make you well. How gloriously we go along! I should like to ride on a railway every day.'

Hippias remarked: 'They say it rather injures the digestion.'

'Nonsense! see how you 'll digest to-night and to-morrow.'

'Perhaps I shall do something yet,' sighed Hippias, alluding to the vast literary fame he had aforetime dreamed of. 'I hope I shall have a good night to-night.'

'Of course you will! What! after laughing like that?'

'Ugh!' Hippias grunted, 'I dare say, Richard, you sleep the moment you get into bed!'

'The instant my head 's on my pillow, and up the moment I wake. Health 's everything!'

'Health 's everything!' echoed Hippias, from his immense distance.

'And if you 'll put yourself in my hands,' Richard continued, 'you shall do just as I do. You shall be well and strong, and sing "Jolly!" like Adrian's blackbird. You shall, upon my honour, uncle!'

He specified the hours of devotion to his uncle's recovery —no less than twelve a day—that he intended to expend, and his cheery robustness almost won his uncle to leap up recklessly and clutch health as his own.

'Mind,' quoth Hippias, with a half-seduced smile, 'mind your dishes are not too savoury!'

'Light food and claret! Regular meals and amusement! Lend your heart to all, but give it to none!' exclaims young Wisdom, and Hippias mutters, 'Yes! yes!' and intimates that the origin of his malady lay in his not following that maxim earlier.

'Love ruins us, my dear boy,' he said, thinking to preach Richard a lesson, and Richard boisterously broke out:

'The love of Monsieur Francatelli,
It was the ruin of—et cetera.'

Hippias blinked, exclaiming, 'Really, my dear boy! I never saw you so excited.'

'It 's the railway! It 's the fun, uncle!'

'Ah!' Hippias wagged a melancholy head, 'you 've got the Golden Bride! Keep her if you can. That 's a pretty fable of your father's. I gave him the idea, though. Austin filches a great many of my ideas!'

'Here 's the idea in verse, uncle:

'O sunless walkers by the tide!
O have you seen the Golden Bride?
They say that she is fair beyond
All women; faithful, and more fond!

You know, the young inquirer comes to a group of penitent sinners by the brink of a stream. They howl, and answer:

'Faithful she is, but she forsakes:
And fond, yet endless woe she makes:
And fair! but with this curse she 's cross'd;
To know her not till she is lost!

Then the doleful party march off in single file solemnly, and the fabulist pursues:

'She hath a palace in the West:
Bright Hesper lights her to her rest:
And him the Morning Star awakes
Whom to her charmèd arms she takes.

So lives he till he sees, alas!
The maids of baser metal pass.

And prodigal of the happiness she lends him, he asks to share it with one of them. There is the Silver Maid, and the Copper, and the Brassy Maid, and others of them. First, you know, he tries Argentine, and finds her only twenty to the pound, and has a worse experience with Copperina, till he descends to the scullery; and the lower he goes, the less obscure become the features of his Bride of Gold, and all her radiance shines forth, my uncle!'

'Verse rather blunts the point. Well, keep to her, now you 've got her,' says Hippias.

'We will, uncle! Look how the farms fly past! Look at the cattle in the fields! And how the lines duck, and swim up!

'She claims the whole, and not the part—
The coin of an unusèd heart!
To gain his Golden Bride again,
He hunts with melancholy men,

and is waked no longer by the Morning Star!'

'Not if he doesn't sleep till an hour before it rises!' Hippias interjected. 'You don't rhyme badly. But stick to prose. Poetry 's a base-metal maid. I 'm not sure that any writing 's good for the digestion. I 'm afraid it has spoilt mine.'

'Fear nothing, uncle!' laughed Richard. 'You shall ride in the park with me every day to get an appetite. You and I and the Golden Bride. You know that little poem of Sandoe's?

'She rides in the park on a prancing bay,
She and her squires together;
Her dark locks gleam from a bonnet of grey,
And toss with the tossing feather.

'Too calmly proud for a glance of pride
Is the beautiful face as it passes;
The cockneys nod to each other aside,
The coxcombs lift their glasses.

'And throng to her, sigh to her, you that can breach
The ice-wall that guards her securely;
You have not such bliss, though she smile on you each,
As the heart that can image her purely.

Wasn't Sandoe once a friend of my father's? I suppose they quarrelled. He understands the heart. What does he make his "Humble Lover" say?

'True, Madam, you may think to part
Conditions by a glacier-ridge,
But Beauty 's for the largest heart,
And all abysses Love can bridge!'

Hippias now laughed; grimly, as men laugh at the emptiness of words.

'Largest heart!' he sneered. 'What 's a "glacier-ridge"? I 've never seen one. I can't deny it rhymes with "bridge." But don't go parading your admiration of that person, Richard. Your father will speak to you on the subject when he thinks fit.'

'I thought they had quarrelled,' said Richard. 'What a pity!' and he murmured to a pleased ear:

'Beauty 's for the largest heart!'

The flow of their conversation was interrupted by the entrance of passengers at a station. Richard examined their faces with pleasure. All faces pleased him. Human nature sat tributary at the feet of him and his Golden Bride. As he could not well talk his thoughts before them, he looked out at the windows, and enjoyed the changing landscape, projecting all sorts of delights for his old friend Ripton, and musing hazily on the wondrous things he was to do in the world; of the great service he was to be to his fellow-creatures. In the midst of his reveries he was landed in London. Tom Bakewell stood at the carriage door. A glance told Richard that his squire had something curious on his mind, and he gave

Tom the word to speak out. Tom edged his master out of hearing, and began sputtering a laugh.

'Dash'd if I can help it, sir!' he said. 'That young Tom! He 've come to town dressed that spicy, and he don't know his way about no more than a stag. He 's come to fetch somebody from another rail, and he don't know how to get there, and he ain't sure about which rail 'tis. Look at him, Mr. Richard! There he goes.'

Young Tom appeared to have the weight of all London on his beaver.

'Who has he come for?' Richard asked.

'Don't you know, sir? You don't like me to mention the name,' mumbled Tom, bursting to be perfectly intelligible.

'Is it for her, Tom?'

'Miss Lucy, sir.'

Richard turned away, and was seized by Hippias, who begged him to get out of the noise and pother, and caught hold of his slack arm to bear him into a conveyance; but Richard, by wheeling half to the right, or left, always got his face round to the point where young Tom was manoeuvring to appear at his ease. Even when they were seated in the conveyance, Hippias could not persuade him to drive off. He made the excuse that he did not wish to start till there was a clear road. At last young Tom cast anchor by a policeman, and, doubtless at the official's suggestion, bashfully took seat in a cab, and was shot into the whirlpool of London. Richard then angrily asked his driver what he was waiting for.

'Are you ill, my boy?' said Hippias. 'Where 's your colour?'

He laughed oddly, and made a random answer that he hoped the fellow would drive fast.

'I hate slow motion after being in the railway,' he said.

Hippias assured him there was something the matter with him.

'Nothing, uncle! nothing!' said Richard, looking fiercely candid.

They say that when the skill and care of men rescue a drowned wretch from extinction, and warm the flickering

spirit into steady flame, such pain it is, the blood forcing its way along the dry channels, and the heavily-ticking nerves, and the sullen heart—the struggle of life and death in him—grim death relaxing his grip, such pain it is, he cries out no thanks to them that pull him by inches from the depths of the dead river. And he who has thought a love extinct, and is surprised by the old fires, and the old tyranny, he rebels, and strives to fight clear of the cloud of forgotten sensations that settle on him; such pain it is, the old sweet music reviving through his frame, and the charm of his passion fixing him afresh. Still was fair Lucy the one woman to Richard. He had forbidden her name but from an instinct of self-defence. Must the maids of baser metal dominate him anew, it is in Lucy's shape. Thinking of her now so near him—his darling! all her graces, her sweetness, her truth; for, despite his bitter blame of her, he knew her true—swam in a thousand visions before his eyes; visions pathetic, and full of glory, that now wrung his heart, and now elated it. As well might a ship attempt to calm the sea, as this young man the violent emotion that began to rage in his breast. 'I shall not see her!' he said to himself exultingly, and at the same instant thought how black was every corner of the earth but that one spot where Lucy stood! how utterly cheerless the place he was going to! Then he determined to bear it; to live in darkness; there was a refuge in the idea of a voluntary martyrdom. 'For if I chose I could see her—this day within an hour! I could see her, and touch her hand, and, oh, heaven! But I do not choose.' And a great wave swelled through him, and was crushed down only to swell again more stormily.

Then Tom Bakewell's words recurred to him, that young Tom Blaize was uncertain where to go for her, and that she might be thrown on this Babylon alone. And flying from point to point, it struck him that they had known at Raynham of her return, and had sent him to town to be out of the way—they had been miserably plotting against him once more. 'They shall see what right they have to fear me. I 'll shame them!' was the first turn taken by his wrathful feelings, as he resolved to go, and see her safe.

and calmly return to his uncle, whom he sincerely believed not to be one of the conspirators. Nevertheless, after forming that resolve, he sat still, as if there were something fatal in the wheels that bore him away from it—perhaps because he knew, as some do when passion is lord, that his intelligence juggled with him; though none the less keenly did he feel his wrongs and suspicions. His Golden Bride was waning fast. But when Hippias ejaculated to cheer him: 'We shall soon be there!' the spell broke. Richard stopped the cab, saying he wanted to speak to Tom, and would ride with him the rest of the journey. He knew well enough which line of railway his Lucy must come by. He had studied every town and station on the line. Before his uncle could express more than a mute remonstrance, he jumped out and hailed Tom Bakewell, who came behind with the boxes and baggage in a companion cab, his head a yard beyond the window to make sure of his ark of safety, the vehicle preceding.

'What an extraordinary, impetuous boy it is,' said Hippias. 'We 're in the very street!'

Within a minute the stalwart Berry, dispatched by the baronet to arrange everything for their comfort, had opened the door, and made his bow.

'Mr. Richard, sir?—evaporated?' was Berry's modulated inquiry.

'Behind—among the boxes, fool!' Hippias growled, as he received Berry's muscular assistance to alight. 'Lunch ready—eh!'

'Luncheon was ordered precise at two o'clock, sir—been in attendance one quarter of an hour. Heah!' Berry sang out to the second cab, which, with its pyramid of luggage, remained stationary some thirty paces distant. At his voice the majestic pile deliberately turned its back on them, and went off in a contrary direction.

CHAPTER XXVI

RECORDS THE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF THE HERO

On the stroke of the hour when Ripton Thompson was accustomed to consult his gold watch for practical purposes, and sniff freedom and the forthcoming dinner, a burglarious foot entered the clerk's office where he sat, and a man of a scowling countenance, who looked a villain, and whom he was afraid he knew, slid a letter into his hands, nodding that it would be prudent for him to read, and be silent. Ripton obeyed in alarm. Apparently the contents of the letter relieved his conscience; for he reached down his hat, and told Mr. Beazley to inform his father that he had business of pressing importance in the west, and should meet him at the station. Mr. Beazley zealously waited upon the paternal Thompson without delay, and together making their observations from the window, they beheld a cab of many boxes, into which Ripton darted and was followed by one in groom's dress. It was Saturday, the day when Ripton gave up his law-readings, magnanimously to bestow himself upon his family, and Mr. Thompson liked to have his son's arm as he walked down to the station; but that third glass of port which always stood for his second, and the groom's suggestion of aristocratic acquaintances, prevented Mr. Thompson from interfering: so Ripton was permitted to depart.

In the cab Ripton made a study of the letter he held. It had the preciseness of an imperial mandate.

'Dear Ripton,—You are to get lodgings for a lady immediately. Not a word to a soul. Then come along with Tom.

R. D. F.'

'Lodgings for a lady!' Ripton meditated aloud: 'What sort of lodgings? Where am I to get lodgings? Who 's the lady?—I say!' he addressed the mysterious messenger. 'So you 're Tom Bakewell, are you, Tom?'

Tom grinned his identity.

'Do you remember the rick, Tom? Ha! ha! We got out of that neatly. We might all have been transported, though. I could have convicted you, Tom, safe! It 's no use coming across a practised lawyer. Now tell me.' Ripton having flourished his powers, commenced his examination: 'Who 's this lady?'

'Better wait till you see Mr. Richard, sir,' Tom resumed his scowl to reply.

'Ah!' Ripton acquiesced. 'Is she young, Tom?'

Tom said she was not old.

'Handsome, Tom?'

'Some might think one thing, some another,' Tom said.

'And where does she come from now?' asked Ripton, with the friendly cheerfulness of a baffled counsellor.

'Comes from the country, sir.'

'A friend of the family, I suppose—a relation?'

Ripton left this insinuating query to be answered by a look. Tom's face was a dead blank.

'Ah!' Ripton took a breath, and eyed the mask opposite him. 'Why, you 're quite a scholar, Tom! Mr. Richard is well? All right at home?'

'Come to town this mornin' with his uncle,' said Tom.

'All well, thank ye, sir.'

'Ha!' cried Ripton, more than ever puzzled, 'now I see. You all came to town to-day, and these are your boxes outside. So, so! But Mr. Richard writes for me to get lodgings for a lady. There must be some mistake—he wrote in a hurry. He wants lodgings for you all—eh?'

''M sure *I* d'n know what he wants,' said Tom. 'You 'd better go by the letter, sir.'

Ripton reconsulted that document. '"Lodgings for a lady, and then come along with Tom. Not a word to a soul." I say! that looks like—but he never cared for *them*. You don't mean to say, Tom, he 's been running away with anybody?'

Tom fell back upon his first reply: 'Better wait till ye see Mr. Richard, sir,' and Ripton exclaimed: 'Hanged if you ain't the tightest witness I ever saw! I shouldn't

like to have you in a box. Some of you country fellows beat any number of cockneys. You do!'

Tom received the compliment stubbornly on his guard, and Ripton, as nothing was to be got out of him, set about considering how to perform his friend's injunctions; deciding firstly, that a lady fresh from the country ought to lodge near the parks, in which direction he told the cabman to drive. Thus, unaware of his high destiny, Ripton joined the hero, and accepted his character in the new comedy.

It is, nevertheless, true that certain favoured people do have beneficent omens to prepare them for their parts when the hero is in full career, so that they really may be nerved to meet him; ay, and to check him in his course, had they that signal courage. For instance, Mrs. Elizabeth Berry, a ripe and wholesome landlady of advertised lodgings, on the borders of Kensington, noted, as she sat rocking her contemplative person before the parlour fire this very March afternoon, a supernatural tendency in that fire to burn *all on one side*: which signifies that a wedding approaches the house. Why—who shall say? Omens are as impassable as heroes. It may be because in these affairs the fire is thought to be all on one side. Enough that the omen exists, and spoke its solemn warning to the devout woman. Mrs. Berry, in her circle, was known as a certificated lecturer against the snares of matrimony. Still that was no reason why she should not like a wedding. Expectant, therefore, she watched the one glowing cheek of Hymen, and with pleasing tremors beheld a cab of many boxes draw up by her bit of garden, and a gentleman emerge from it in the act of consulting an advertisement paper. The gentleman required lodgings for a lady. Lodgings for a lady Mrs. Berry could produce, and a very roseate smile for a gentleman; so much so that Ripton forgot to ask about the terms, which made the landlady in Mrs. Berry leap up to embrace him as the happy man. But her experienced woman's eye checked her enthusiasm. He had not the air of a bridegroom: he did not seem to have a weight on his chest, or an itch to twiddle everything with his fingers. At any rate, he was not the bridegroom

for whom omens fly abroad. Promising to have all ready for the lady within an hour, Mrs. Berry fortified him with her card, curtsied him back to his cab, and floated him off on her smiles.

The remarkable vehicle which had woven this thread of intrigue through London streets, now proceeded sedately to finish its operations. Ripton was landed at a hotel in Westminster. Ere he was half-way up the stairs, a door opened, and his old comrade in adventure rushed down. Richard allowed no time for salutations. 'Have you done it?' was all he asked. For answer Ripton handed him Mrs. Berry's card. Richard took it, and left him standing there. Five minutes elapsed, and then Ripton heard the gracious rustle of feminine garments above. Richard came a little in advance, leading and half-supporting a figure in a black silk mantle and small black straw bonnet; young—that was certain, though she held her veil so closely he could hardly catch the outlines of her face; girlishly slender, and sweet and simple in appearance. The hush that came with her, and her soft manner of moving, stirred the silly youth to some of those ardours that awaken the Knight of Dames in our bosoms. He felt that he would have given considerable sums for her to lift her veil. He could see that she was trembling—perhaps weeping. It was the master of her fate she clung to. They passed him without speaking. As she went by, her head passively bent, Ripton had a glimpse of noble tresses and a lovely neck; great golden curls hung loosely behind, pouring from under her bonnet. She looked a captive borne to the sacrifice. What Ripton, after a sight of those curls, would have given for her just to lift her veil an instant and strike him blind with beauty, was, fortunately for his exchequer, never demanded of him. And he had absolutely been composing speeches as he came along in the cab! gallant speeches for the lady, and sly congratulatory ones for his friend, to be delivered as occasion should serve, that both might know him a man of the world, and be at their ease. He forgot the smirking immoralities he had revelled in. This was clearly serious. Ripton did not require to be told that his friend was in love, and meant that life and

death business called marriage, parents and guardians consenting or not.

Presently Richard returned to him, and said hurriedly: 'I want you now to go to my uncle at our hotel. Keep him quiet till I come. Say I had to see you—say anything. I shall be there by the dinner hour. Rip, I must talk to you alone after dinner.'

Ripton feebly attempted to reply that he was due at home. He was very curious to hear the plot of the new comedy; and besides, there was Richard's face questioning him sternly and confidently for signs of unhesitating obedience. He finished his grimaces by asking the name and direction of the hotel. Richard pressed his hand. It is much to obtain even that recognition of our devotion from the hero.

Tom Bakewell also received his priming, and, to judge by his chuckles and grins, rather appeared to enjoy the work cut out for him. In a few minutes they had driven to their separate destinations; Ripton was left to the unusual exercise of his fancy. Such is the nature of youth and its thirst for romance, that only to act as a subordinate is pleasant. When one unfurls the standard of defiance to parents and guardians, he may be sure of raising a lawless troop of adolescent ruffians, born rebels, to any amount. The beardless crew know that they have not a chance of pay; but what of that when the rosy prospect of thwarting their elders is in view? Though it is to see another eat the forbidden fruit, they will run all his risks with him. Gaily Ripton took rank as lieutenant in the enterprise, and the moment his heart had sworn the oaths, he was rewarded by an exquisite sense of the charms of existence. London streets wore a sly laugh to him. He walked with a dandified heel. The generous youth ogled aristocratic carriages, and glanced intimately at the ladies, overflowingly happy. The crossing-sweepers blessed him. He hummed lively tunes, he turned over old jokes in his mouth unctuously, he hugged himself, he had a mind to dance down Piccadilly, and all because a friend of his was running away with a pretty girl, and he was in the secret.

It was only when he stood on the doorstep of Richard's hotel, that his jocund mood was a little dashed by remembering that he had then to commence the duties of his office, and must fabricate a plausible story to account for what he knew nothing about—a part that the greatest of sages would find it difficult to perform. The young, however, whom sages well may envy, seldom fail in lifting their inventive faculties to the level of their spirits, and two minutes of Hippias's angry complaints against the friend he serenely inquired for, gave Ripton his cue.

'We 're in the very street—within a stone's-throw of the house, and he jumps like a harlequin out of my cab into another; he must be mad—that boy 's got madness in him—and carries off all the boxes—my dinner-pills, too! and keeps away the whole of the day, though he promised to go to the doctor, and had a dozen engagements with me,' said Hippias, venting an enraged snarl to sum up his grievances.

Ripton at once told him that the doctor was not at home.

'Why, you don't mean to say he 's been to the doctor?' Hippias cried out.

'He has called on him twice, sir,' said Ripton expressively. 'On leaving me he was going a third time. I shouldn't wonder that 's what detains him — he 's so determined!'

By fine degrees, Ripton ventured to grow circumstantial, saying that Richard's case was urgent and required immediate medical advice; and that both he and his father were of opinion Richard should not lose an hour in obtaining it.

'He 's alarmed about himself,' said Ripton, and tapped his chest.

Hippias protested he had never heard a word from his nephew of any physical affliction.

'He was afraid of making you anxious, I think, sir.'

Algernon Feverel and Richard came in while he was hammering at the alphabet to recollect the first letter of the doctor's name. They had met in the hall below, and were laughing heartily as they entered the room. Ripton jumped up to get the initiative.

'Have you seen the doctor?' he asked, plucking at Richard's fingers.

Richard was all abroad at the question.

Algernon clapped him on the back. 'What the deuce do you want with doctor, boy?'

The solid thump awakened him to see matters as they were. 'Oh, ay! the doctor!' he said, smiling frankly at his lieutenant. 'Why, he tells me he 'd back me to do Milo's trick in a week from the present day. Uncle,' he came forward to Hippias, 'I hope you 'll excuse me for running off as I did. I was in a hurry. I left something at the railway. This stupid Rip thinks I went to the doctor about myself. The fact was, I wanted to fetch the doctor to see you here—so that you might have no trouble, you know. You can't bear the sight of his instruments and skeletons—I 've heard you say so. You said it set all your marrow in revolt—"fried your marrow," I think were the words, and made you see twenty thousand different ways of sliding down to the chambers of the grim king. Don't you remember?'

Hippias emphatically did not remember, and he did not believe the story. Irritation at the mad ravishment of his pill-box rendered him incredulous. As he had no means of confuting his nephew, all he could do safely to express his disbelief in him, was to utter petulant remarks on his powerlessness to appear at the dinner-table that day: upon which—Berry just then trumpeting dinner—Algernon seized one arm of the Dyspepsy, and Richard another, and the laughing couple bore him into the room where dinner was laid, Ripton sniggering in the rear, the really happy man of the party.

They had fun at the dinner-table. Richard would have it; and his gaiety, his by-play, his princely superiority to truth and heroic promise of overriding all our laws, his handsome face, the lord and possessor of beauty that he looked, as it were a star shining on his forehead, gained the old complete mastery over Ripton, who had been, mentally at least, half patronizing him till then, because he knew more of London and life, and was aware that his friend now depended upon him almost entirely.

After a second circle of the claret, the hero caught his lieutenant's eye across the table, and said:

'We must go out and talk over that law business, Rip, before you go. Do you think the old lady has any chance?'

'Not a bit!' said Ripton authoritatively.

'But it 's worth fighting—eh, Rip?'

'Oh, certainly!' was Ripton's mature opinion.

Richard observed that Ripton's father seemed doubtful. Ripton cited his father's habitual caution. Richard made a playful remark on the necessity of sometimes acting in opposition to fathers. Ripton agreed to it—in certain cases.

'Yes, yes, in certain cases,' said Richard.

'Pretty legal morality, gentlemen!' Algernon interjected; Hippias adding: 'And lay, too!'

The pair of uncles listened further to the fictitious dialogue, well kept up on both sides, and in the end desired a statement of the old lady's garrulous case; Hippias offering to decide what her chances were in law, and Algernon to give a common-sense judgment.

'Rip will tell you,' said Richard, deferentially signalling the lawyer. 'I 'm a bad hand at these matters. Tell them how it stands, Rip.'

Ripton disguised his excessive uneasiness under endeavours to right his position on his chair, and, inwardly praying speed to the claret jug to come and strengthen his wits, began with a careless aspect: 'Oh, nothing! She—very curious old character! She—a—wears a wig. She—a—very curious old character indeed! She—a—quite the old style. There 's no doing anything with her!' and Ripton took a long breath to relieve himself after his elaborate fiction.

'So it appears,' Hippias commented, and Algernon asked: 'Well, and about her wig? Somebody stole it?' while Richard, whose features were grim with suppressed laughter, bade the narrator continue.

Ripton lunged for the claret jug. He had got an old lady like an oppressive bundle on his brain, and he was as helpless as she was. In the pangs of ineffectual authorship his ideas shot at her wig, and then at her one characteristic of extreme obstinacy, and tore back again at her

wig, but she would not be animated. The obstinate old thing would remain a bundle. Law studies seemed light in comparison with this tremendous task of changing an old lady from a doll to a human creature. He flung off some claret, perspired freely, and, with a mental tribute to the cleverness of those author fellows, recommenced: 'Oh, nothing! She—Richard knows her better than I do —an old lady—somewhere down in Suffolk. I think we had better advise her not to proceed. The expenses of litigation are enormous! She — I think we had better advise her to stop short, and not make any scandal.'

'And not make any scandal!' Algernon took him up. 'Come, come! there 's something more than a wig, then?'

Ripton was commanded to proceed, whether she did or no. The luckless fictionist looked straight at his pitiless leader, and blurted out dubiously: 'She — there 's a daughter.'

'Born with effort!' ejaculated Hippias. 'Must give her pause after that! and I 'll take the opportunity to stretch my length on the sofa. Heigho! that 's true what Austin says: "The general prayer should be for a full stomach, and the individual for one that works well; for on that basis only are we a match for temporal matters, and able to contemplate eternal." Sententious, but true. I gave him the idea, though! Take care of your stomachs, boys! and if ever you hear a monument proposed to a scientific cook or gastronomic doctor, send in your subscriptions. Or say to him while he lives, Go forth, and be a knight! Ha! They have a good cook at this house. He suits me better than ours at Raynham. I almost wish I had brought my manuscript to town, I feel so much better. Aha! I didn't expect to digest at all without my regular incentive. I think I shall give it up. What do you say to the theatre to-night, boys!'

Richard shouted, 'Bravo, uncle!'

'Let Mr. Thompson finish first,' said Algernon. 'I want to hear the conclusion of the story. The old girl has a wig and a daughter. I 'll swear somebody runs away with one of the two! Fill your glass, Mr. Thompson, and forward!'

'So somebody does,' Ripton received his impetus. 'And they 're found in town together,' he made a fresh jerk. 'She—a—that is, the old lady—found them in company.'

'She finds him with her wig on in company!' said Algernon. 'Capital! Here 's matter for the lawyers!'

'And you advise her not to proceed, under such circumstances of aggravation?' Hippias observed, humorously twinkling with his stomachic contentment.

'It 's the daughter,' Ripton sighed, and surrendering to pressure, hurried on recklessly. 'A runaway match—beautiful girl—the only son of a baronet—married by special licence. A—the point is,' he now brightened and spoke from his own element, 'the point is whether the marriage can be annulled, as she 's of the Catholic persuasion and he 's a Protestant, and they 're both married under age. That 's the point.'

Having come to the point he breathed extreme relief, and saw things more distinctly; not a little amazed at his leader's horrified face.

The two elders were making various absurd inquiries, when Richard sent his chair to the floor, crying: 'What a muddle you 're in, Rip! You 're mixing half a dozen stories together. The old lady I told you about was old Dame Bakewell, and the dispute was concerning a neighbour of hers who encroached on her garden, and I said I 'd pay the money to see her righted!'

'Ah,' said Ripton humbly, 'I was thinking of the other. Her garden! Cabbages don't interest me——'

'Here, come along,' Richard beckoned to him savagely. 'I 'll be back in five minutes, uncle,' he nodded coolly to either.

The young men left the room. In the hall-passage they met Berry, dressed to return to Raynham. Richard dropped a helper to the intelligence into his hand, and warned him not to gossip much of London. Berry bowed perfect discreetness.

'What on earth induced you to talk about Protestants and Catholics marrying, Rip?' said Richard, as soon as they were in the street.

'Why,' Ripton answered, 'I was so hard pushed for it, 'pon my honour, I didn't know what to say. I ain't an author, you know; I can't make a story. I was trying to invent a point, and I couldn't think of any other, and I thought that was just the point likely to make a jolly good dispute. Capital dinners they give at those crack hotels. Why did you throw it all upon me? I didn't begin on the old lady.'

The hero mused, 'It 's odd! It 's impossible you could have known! I 'll tell you why, Rip! I wanted to try you. You fib well at long range, but you don't do at close quarters and single combat. You 're good behind walls, but not worth a shot in the open. I just see what you 're fit for. You 're staunch—that I am certain of. You always were. Lead the way to one of the parks—down in that direction. You know—where she is!'

Ripton led the way. His dinner had prepared this young Englishman to defy the whole artillery of established morals. With the muffled roar of London around them, alone in a dark slope of green, the hero, leaning on his henchman, and speaking in a harsh clear undertone, delivered his explanations. Doubtless the true heroic insignia and point of view will be discerned, albeit in common private's uniform.

'They 've been plotting against me for a year, Rip! When you see her, you 'll know what it was to have such a creature taken away from you. It nearly killed me. Never mind what she is. She 's the most perfect and noble creature God ever made! It 's not only her beauty—I don't care so much about that—but when you 've once seen her, she seems to draw music from all the nerves of your body; but she 's such an angel. I worship her. And her mind 's like her face. She 's pure gold. There, you 'll see her to-night.

'Well,' he pursued, after inflating Ripton with this rapturous prospect, 'they got her away, and I recovered. It was Mister Adrian's work. What 's my father's objection to her? Because of her birth? She 's educated; her manners are beautiful—full of refinement—quick and soft! Can they show me one of their ladies like her?

She 's the daughter of a naval lieutenant! Because she 's a Catholic? What has religion to do with'—he pronounced 'love!' a little modestly—as it were a blush in his voice.

'Well, when I recovered I thought I did not care for her. It shows how we know ourselves! And I cared for nothing. I felt as if I had no blood. I tried to imitate my dear Austin. I wish to God he were here. I love Austin. He would understand her. He 's coming back this year, and then—but it 'll be too late then. Well, my father 's always scheming to make me perfect—he has never spoken to me a word about her, but I can see her in his eyes—he wanted to give me a change, he said, and asked me to come to town with my Uncle Hippy, and I consented. It was another plot to get me out of the way! As I live, I had no more idea of meeting her than of flying to heaven!'

He lifted his face. 'Look at those old elm branches! How they seem to mix among the stars—glittering fruits of winter!'

Ripton tipped his comical nose upward, and was in duty bound to say 'Yes,' though he observed no connection between them and the narrative.

'Well,' the hero went on, 'I came to town. There I heard she was coming, too—coming home. It must have been fate, Ripton! Heaven forgive me! I was angry with her, and I thought I should like to see her once—only once—and reproach her for being false—for she never wrote to me. And, oh, the dear angel! what she must have suffered! I gave my uncle the slip, and got to the railway she was coming by. There was a fellow going to meet her—a farmer's son—and, good God! they were going to try and make her marry him! I remembered it all then. A servant of the farm had told me. That fellow went to the wrong station, I suppose, for we saw nothing of him. There she was—not changed a bit—looking lovelier than ever! And when she saw me, I knew in a minute that she must love me till death! You don't know what it is yet, Rip! Will you believe it? Though I was as sure she loved me and had been true as steel, as

that I shall see her to-night, I spoke bitterly to her. And she bore it meekly—she looked like a saint. I told her there was but one hope of life for me—she must prove she was true, and as I give up all, so must she. I don't know what I said. The thought of losing her made me mad. She tried to plead with me to wait—it was for my sake, I know. I pretended, like a miserable hypocrite, that she did not love me at all. I think I said shameful things. Oh, what noble creatures women are! She hardly had strength to move. I took her to that place where you found us. Rip, she went down on her knees to me. I never dreamed of anything in life so lovely as she looked then. Her eyes were thrown up, bright with a crowd of tears—her dark brows bent together, like Pain and Beauty meeting in one; and her glorious golden hair swept off her shoulders as she hung forward to my hands. Could I lose such a prize? If anything could have persuaded me, would not that? I thought of Dante's Madonna—Guido's Magdalen. Is there sin in it? I see none! And if there is, it 's all mine! I swear she 's spotless of a thought of sin. I see her very soul! Cease to love her? Who dares ask me? Cease to love her? Why I live on her! To see her little chin straining up from her throat, as she knelt to me—there was one curl that fell across her throat . . .'

Ripton listened for more. Richard had gone off in a muse at the picture.

'Well?' said Ripton, 'and how about that young farmer fellow?'

The hero's head was again contemplating the starry branches. His lieutenant's question came to him after an interval.

'Young Tom? Why, it 's young Tom Blaize—son of our old enemy, Rip! I like the old man now. Oh, I saw nothing of the fellow.'

'Lord!' cried Ripton, 'are we going to get into a mess with Blaize again? I don't like that!'

His commander quietly passed his likes or dislikes.

'But when he goes to the train, and finds she 's not there?' Ripton suggested.

'I 've provided for that. The fool went to the south-east instead of the south-west. All warmth, all sweetness, comes with the south-west! I 've provided for that, friend Rip. My trusty Tom awaits him there, as if by accident. He tells him he has not seen her, and advises him to remain in town, and go for her there to-morrow, and the day following. Tom has money for the work. Young Tom ought to see London, you know, Rip—like you. We shall gain some good clear days. And when old Blaize hears of it—what then? I have her! she 's mine! Besides, he won't hear for a week. This Tom beats that Tom in cunning, I 'll wager. Ha! ha!' the hero burst out at a recollection. 'What do you think, Rip? My father has some sort of System with me, it appears, and when I came to town the time before, he took me to some people —the Grandisons—and what do you think? one of the daughters is a little girl—a nice little thing enough—very funny—and he wants me to wait for her! He hasn't said so, but I know it. I know what he means. Nobody understands him but me. I know he loves me, and is one of the best of men—but just consider—a *little girl* who just comes up to my elbow! Isn't it ridiculous? Did you ever hear such nonsense?'

Ripton emphasized his opinion that it certainly was foolish.

'No, no! The die 's cast!' said Richard. 'They 've been plotting for a year up to this day, and this is what comes of it! If my father loves me, he will love her. And if he loves me, he 'll forgive my acting against his wishes, and see it was the only thing to be done. Come! step out, what a time we 've been!' and away he went, compelling Ripton to the sort of strides a drummer-boy has to take beside a column of grenadiers.

Ripton began to wish himself in love, seeing that it endowed a man with wind so that he could breathe great sighs, while going at a tremendous pace, and experience no sensation of fatigue. The hero was communing with the elements, his familiars, and allowed him to pant as he pleased. Some keen-eyed Kensington urchins, noticing the discrepancy between the pedestrian powers of the

two, aimed their wit at Mr. Thompson junior's expense. The pace, and nothing but the pace, induced Ripton to proclaim that they had gone too far, when they discovered that they had overshot the mark by half a mile. In the street over which stood love's star, the hero thundered his presence at a door, and evoked a flying housemaid, who knew not Mrs. Berry. The hero attached significance to the fact that his instincts should have betrayed him, for he could have sworn to that house. The door being shut he stood in dead silence.

'Haven't you got her card?' Ripton inquired, and heard that it was in the custody of the cabman. Neither of them could positively bring to mind the number of the house.

'You ought to have chalked it, like that fellow in *The Forty Thieves*,' Ripton hazarded a pleasantry which met with no response.

Betrayed by his instincts, the magic slaves of Love! The hero heavily descended the steps.

Ripton murmured that they were done for. His commander turned on him, and said: 'Take all the houses on the opposite side, one after another. I 'll take these.' With a wry face Ripton crossed the road, altogether subdued by Richard's native superiority to adverse circumstances.

Then were families aroused. Then did mortals dimly guess that something portentous was abroad. Then were labourers all day in the vineyard, harshly wakened from their evening's nap. Hope and Fear stalked the street, as again and again the loud companion summonses resounded. Finally Ripton sang out cheerfully. He had Mrs. Berry before him, profuse of mellow curtsies.

Richard ran to her, and caught her hands: 'She 's well —upstairs?'

'Oh, quite well, only a trifle tired with her journey, and fluttering-like,' Mrs. Berry replied to Ripton alone. The lover had flown aloft.

The wise woman sagely ushered Ripton into her own private parlour, there to wait till he was wanted.

CHAPTER XXVII

CONTAINS AN INTERCESSION FOR THE HEROINE

'In all cases where two have joined to commit an offence, punish one of the two lightly,' is the dictum of *The Pilgrim's Scrip*.

It is possible for young heads to conceive proper plans of action, and occasionally, by sheer force of will, to check the wild horses that are ever fretting to gallop off with them. But when they have given the reins and the whip to another, what are they to do? They may go down on their knees, and beg and pray the furious charioteer to stop, or moderate his pace. Alas! each fresh thing they do redoubles his ardour. There is a power in their troubled beauty women learn the use of, and what wonder? They have seen it kindle Ilium to flames so often! But ere they grow matronly in the house of Menelaus, they weep, and implore, and do not in truth know how terribly two-edged is their gift of loveliness. They resign themselves to an incomprehensible frenzy; pleasant to them, because they attribute it to excessive love. And so the very sensible things which they can and do say, are vain.

I reckon it absurd to ask them to be quite in earnest. Are not those their own horses in yonder team? Certainly, if they were quite in earnest, they might soon have my gentleman as sober as a carter. A hundred different ways of disenchanting him exist, and Adrian will point you out one or two that shall be instantly efficacious. For Love, the charioteer, is easily tripped, while honest jog-trot Love keeps his legs to the end. Granted dear women are not quite in earnest, still the mere words they utter should be put to their good account. They do mean them, though their hearts are set the wrong way. 'Tis a despairing, pathetic homage to the judgment of the

majority, in whose faces they are flying. Punish Helen, very young, lightly. After a certain age you may select her for special chastisement. An innocent with Theseus, with Paris she is an advanced incendiary.

The fair young girl was sitting as her lover had left her; trying to recall her stunned senses. Her bonnet was unremoved, her hands clasped on her knees; dry tears in her eyes. Like a dutiful slave, she rose to him. And first he claimed her mouth. There was a speech, made up of all the pretty wisdom her wild situation and true love could gather, awaiting him there; but his kiss scattered it to fragments. She dropped to her seat weeping, and hiding her shamed cheeks.

By his silence she divined his thoughts, and took his hand and drew it to her lips.

He bent beside her, bidding her look at him.

'Keep your eyes so.'

She could not.

'Do you fear me, Lucy?'

A throbbing pressure answered him.

'Do you love me, darling?'

She trembled from head to foot.

'Then why do you turn from me?'

She wept: 'Oh, Richard, take me home! take me home!'

'Look at me, Lucy!'

Her head shrank timidly round.

'Keep your eyes on me, darling! Now speak!'

But she could not look and speak too. The lover knew his mastery when he had her eyes.

'You wish me to take you home?'

She faltered: 'Oh, Richard, it is not too late.'

'You regret what you have done for me?'

'Dearest! it is ruin.'

'You weep because you have consented to be mine?'

'Not for me! Oh, Richard!'

'For me you weep? Look at me! For me?'

'How will it end! Oh, Richard!'

'You weep for me?'

'Dearest! I would die for you!'

'Would you see me indifferent to everything in the

world? Would you have me lost? Do you think I will live another day in England without you? I have staked all I have on you, Lucy. You have nearly killed me once. A second time, and the earth will not be troubled by me. You ask me to wait, when they are plotting against us on all sides? Darling Lucy, look on me. Fix your fond eyes on me. You ask me to wait when here you are given to me—when you have proved my faith—when we know we love as none have loved. Give me your eyes! Let them tell me I have your heart!'

Where was her wise little speech? How could she match such mighty eloquence? She sought to collect a few more of the scattered fragments.

'Dearest, your father may be brought to consent by and by, and then—oh! if you take me home now——'

The lover stood up. 'He who has been arranging that fine scheme to disgrace and martyrize you? True, as I live, that 's the reason of their having you back! Your old servant heard him and your uncle discussing it. He—Lucy he 's a good man, but he must not step in between you and me. I say God has given you to me.'

He was down by her side again, his arms enfolding her.

She had hoped to fight a better battle than in the morning, and she was weaker and softer.

Ah! why should she doubt that his great love was the first law to her? Why should she not believe that she would wreck him by resisting? And if she suffered, oh, sweet to think it was for his sake! Sweet to shut out wisdom; accept total blindness, and be led by him!

The hag Wisdom annoyed them little further. She rustled her garments ominously, and vanished.

'Oh, my own Richard!' the fair girl just breathed.

He whispered, 'Call me that name.'

She blushed deeply.

'Call me that name,' he repeated. 'You said it once to-day.'

'Dearest!'

'Not that.'

'Oh, darling!'

'Not that.'

'Husband!'

She was won. The rosy gate from which the word had issued was closed with a seal.

Ripton did not enjoy his introduction to the caged bird of beauty that night. He received a lesson in the art of pumping from the worthy landlady below, up to an hour when she yawned, and he blinked, and their common candle wore with dignity the brigand's hat of midnight, and cocked a drunken eye at them from under it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

RELATES HOW PREPARATIONS FOR ACTION WERE CONDUCTED UNDER THE APRIL OF LOVERS

BEAUTY, of course, is for the hero. Nevertheless, it is not always he on whom beauty works its most conquering influence. It is the dull commonplace man into whose slow brain she drops like a celestial light, and burns lastingly. The poet, for instance, is a connoisseur of beauty: to the artist she is a model. These gentlemen by much contemplation of her charms wax critical. The days when they had hearts being gone, they are haply divided between the blonde and the brunette; the aquiline nose and the Proserpine; this shaped eye and that. But go about among simple unprofessional fellows, boors, dunderheads, and here and there you shall find some barbarous intelligence which has had just strength enough to conceive, and has taken Beauty as its goddess, and knows but one form to worship, in its poor stupid fashion, and would perish for her. Nay, more: the man would devote all his days to her, though he is dumb as a dog. And, indeed, he is Beauty's Dog. Almost every Beauty has her Dog. The hero possesses her; the poet proclaims her; the painter puts her upon canvas; and the faithful old dog follows her: and the end of it all is that the faithful old dog is her single attendant. Sir Hero is revelling in the wars, or in Armida's bowers; Mr. Poet has spied a wrinkle; the brush is for the rose in its season. She turns to her old dog then. She hugs him; and he, who has subsisted on a bone and a pat till there he squats decrepit, he turns his grateful old eyes up to her, and has not a notion that she is hugging sad memories in him: hero, poet, painter, in one scrubby one! Then is she buried, and the village hears languid howls, and there is a paragraph in the newspapers concerning the extraordinary fidelity of an old dog.

Excited by suggestive recollections of Nooredeen and the

fair Persian, and the change in the obscure monotony of his life by his having quarters in a crack hotel, and living familiarly with west-end people—living on the fat of the land (which forms a stout portion of an honest youth's romance), Ripton Thompson breakfasted next morning with his chief at half-past eight. The meal had been fixed overnight for seven, but Ripton slept a great deal more than the nightingale, and (to chronicle his exact state) even half-past eight rather afflicted his new aristocratic senses and reminded him too keenly of law and bondage. He had preferred to breakfast at Algernon's hour, who had left word for eleven. Him, however, it was Richard's object to avoid, so they fell to, and Ripton no longer envied Hippias in bed. Breakfast done, they bequeathed the consoling information for Algernon that they were off to hear a popular preacher, and departed.

'How happy everybody looks!' said Richard, in the quiet Sunday streets.

'Yes—jolly!' said Ripton.

'When I 'm—when this is over, I 'll see that they are, too—as many as I can make happy,' said the hero, adding softly: 'Her blind was down at a quarter to six. I think she slept well!'

'You 've been there this morning?' Ripton exclaimed; and an idea of what love was dawned upon his dull brain.

'Will she see me, Ricky?'

'Yes. She 'll see you to-day. She was tired last night.'

'Positively?'

Richard assured him that the privilege would be his.

'Here,' he said, coming under some trees in the park, 'here 's where I talked to you last night. What a time it seems! How I hate the night!'

On the way, that Richard might have an exalted opinion of him, Ripton hinted decorously at a somewhat intimate and mysterious acquaintance with the sex. Headings of certain random adventures he gave.

'Well!' said his chief, 'why not marry her?'

Then was Ripton shocked, and cried, 'Oh!' and had a taste of the feeling of superiority, destined that day to be crushed utterly.

He was again deposited in Mrs. Berry's charge for a term that caused him dismal fears that the fair Persian still refused to show her face, but Richard called out to him, and up Ripton went, unaware of the transformation he was to undergo. Hero and Beauty stood together to receive him. From the bottom of the stairs he had his vivaciously agreeable smile ready for them, and by the time he entered the room his cheeks were painfully stiff, and his eyes had strained beyond their exact meaning. Lucy, with one hand anchored to her lover, welcomed him kindly. He relieved her shyness by looking so extremely silly. They sat down, and tried to commence a conversation, but Ripton was as little master of his tongue as he was of his eyes. After an interval, the fair Persian having done duty by showing herself, was glad to quit the room. Her lord and possessor then turned inquiringly to Ripton.

'You don't wonder now, Rip?' he said.

'No, Richard!' Ripton waited to reply with sufficient solemnity, 'indeed I don't!'

He spoke differently; he looked differently. He had the old dog's eyes in his head. They watched the door she had passed through; they listened for her, as dogs' eyes do. When she came in, bonneted for a walk, his agitation was dog-like. When she hung on her lover timidly, and went forth, he followed without an idea of envy, or anything save the secret raptures the sight of her gave him, which are the old dog's own. For beneficent Nature requites him. His sensations cannot be heroic, but they have a fullness and a wagging delight as good in their way. And this capacity for humble unaspiring worship has its peculiar guerdon. When Ripton comes to think of Miss Random now, what will he think of himself? Let no one despise the old dog. Through him doth Beauty vindicate her sex.

It did not please Ripton that others should have the bliss of beholding her, and as, to his perceptions, everybody did, and observed her offensively, and stared, and turned their heads back, and interchanged comments on her, and became in a minute madly in love with her, he had to smother low growls. They strolled about the

pleasant gardens of Kensington all the morning, under the young chestnut buds, and round the windless waters, talking, and soothing the wild excitement of their hearts. If Lucy spoke, Ripton pricked up his ears. She, too, made the remark that everybody seemed to look happy, and he heard it with thrills of joy. 'So everybody is, where you are!' he would have wished to say, if he dared, but was restrained by fears that his burning eloquence would commit him. Ripton knew the people he met twice. It would have been difficult to persuade him they were the creatures of accident.

From the gardens, in contempt of Ripton's frowned protest, Richard boldly struck into the park, where solitary carriages were beginning to perform the circuit. Here Ripton had some justification for his jealous pangs. The young girl's golden locks of hair; her sweet, now dreamily sad, face; her gentle graceful figure in the black straight dress she wore; a sort of half-conventual air she had—a mark of something not of class, that was partly beauty's, partly maiden innocence growing conscious, partly remorse at her weakness and dim fear of the future it was sowing—did attract the eye-glasses. Ripton had to learn that eyes are bearable, but eye-glasses an abomination. They fixed a spell upon his courage; for somehow the youth had always ranked them as emblems of our nobility, and hearing two exquisite eye-glasses, who had been to front and rear several times, drawl in gibberish generally imputed to lords, that his heroine was a charming little creature, just the size, but had no style—he was abashed; he did not fly at them and tear them. He became dejected. Beauty's Dog is affected by the eye-glass in a manner not unlike the common animal's terror of the human eye.

Richard appeared to hear nothing, or it was homage that he heard. He repeated to Lucy, Diaper Sandoe's verses:

> 'The cockneys nod to each other aside,
> The coxcombs lift their glasses,'

and projected hiring a horse for her to ride every day in the park, and shine among the highest.

They had turned to the west, against the sky glittering through the bare trees across the water, and the bright-edged rack. The lover, his imagination just then occupied in clothing earthly glories in celestial, felt where his senses were sharpest the hand of his darling falter, and instinctively looked ahead. His Uncle Algernon was leisurely jolting towards them on his one sound leg. The dismembered Guardsman talked to a friend whose arm supported him, and speculated from time to time on the fair ladies driving by. The two white faces passed him unobserved. Unfortunately Ripton, coming behind, went plump upon the captain's live toe—or so he pretended, crying: 'Confound it, Mr. Thompson! you might have chosen the other.'

The horrible apparition did confound Ripton, who stammered that it was extraordinary.

'Not at all,' said Algernon. 'Everybody makes up to that fellow. Instinct, I suppose!'

He had not to ask for his nephew. Richard turned to face the matter.

'Sorry I couldn't wait for you this morning, uncle,' he said, with the coolness of relationship. 'I thought you never walked so far.'

His voice was in perfect tone—the heroic mask admirable.

Algernon examined the downcast visage at his side, and contrived to allude to the popular preacher. He was instantly introduced to Ripton's sister, Miss Thompson.

The captain bowed, smiling melancholy approval of his nephew's choice of a minister. After a few stray remarks, and an affable salute to Miss Thompson, he hobbled away, and then the three sealed volcanoes breathed, and Lucy's arm ceased to be squeezed quite so much up to the heroic pitch.

This incident quickened their steps homeward to the sheltering wings of Mrs. Berry. All that passed between them on the subject comprised a stammered excuse from Ripton for his conduct, and a good-humoured rejoinder from Richard, that he had gained a sister by it: at which Ripton ventured to wish aloud Miss Desborough would only think so, and a faint smile twitched poor Lucy's lips

to please him. She hardly had strength to reach her cage. She had none to eat of Mrs. Berry's nice little dinner. To be alone, that she might cry and ease her heart of its accusing weight of tears, was all she prayed for. Kind Mrs. Berry, slipping into her bedroom to take off her things, found the fair body in a fevered shudder, and finished by undressing her completely and putting her to bed.

'Just an hour's sleep, or so,' the mellifluous woman explained the case to the two anxious gentlemen. 'A quiet sleep and a cup of warm tea goes for more than twenty doctors, it do—when there 's the flutters,' she pursued. 'I know it by myself. And a good cry beforehand 's better than the best of medicine.'

She nursed them into a make-believe of eating, and retired to her softer charge and sweeter babe, reflecting, 'Lord! Lord! the three of 'em don't make fifty! I 'm as old as two and a half of 'em, to say the least.' Mrs. Berry used her apron, and by virtue of their tender years took them all three into her heart.

Left alone, neither of the young men could swallow a morsel.

'Did you see the change come over her?' Richard whispered.

Ripton fiercely accused his prodigious stupidity.

The lover flung down his knife and fork: 'What could I do? If I had said nothing, we should have been suspected. I was obliged to speak. And she hates a lie! See, it has struck her down! God forgive me!'

Ripton affected a serene mind: 'It was a fright, Richard,' he said. 'That 's what Mrs. Berry means by flutters. Those old women talk in that way. You heard what she said. And these old women know. I 'll tell you what it is. It 's this, Richard—it 's because you 've got a fool for your friend!'

'She regrets it,' muttered the lover. 'Good God! I think she fears me.' He dropped his face in his hands.

Ripton went to the window, repeating energetically for his comfort: 'It 's because you 've got a fool for your friend!'

Sombre grew the street they had last night aroused.

The sun was buried alive in cloud. Ripton saw himself no more in the opposite window. He watched the deplorable objects passing on the pavement. His aristocratic visions had gone like his breakfast. Beauty had been struck down by his egregious folly, and there he stood—a wretch!

Richard came to him: 'Don't mumble on like that, Rip!' he said. 'Nobody blames you.'

'Ah! you 're very kind, Richard,' interposed the wretch, moved at the face of misery he beheld.

'Listen to me, Rip! I shall take her home to-night. Yes! If she 's happier away from me—do you think me a brute, Ripton? Rather than have her shed a tear, I 'd——! I 'll take her home to-night!'

Ripton suggested that it was sudden; adding from his larger experience, people perhaps might talk.

The lover could not understand what they should talk about, but he said: 'If I give him who came for her yesterday the clue? If no one sees or hears of me, what can they say? Oh, Rip! I 'll give her up. I 'm wrecked for ever! What of that? Yes—let them take her! The world in arms should never have torn her from me, but when she cries—Yes! all 's over. I 'll find him at once.'

He searched in out-of-the-way corners for the hat of resolve. Ripton looked on, wretcheder than ever.

The idea struck him: 'Suppose, Richard, she doesn't want to go?'

It was a moment when, perhaps, one who sided with parents and guardians and the old wise world, might have inclined them to pursue their righteous wretched course, and have given small Cupid a smack and sent him home to his naughty mother. Alas! (it is *The Pilgrim's Scrip* interjecting) women are the born accomplices of mischief! In bustles Mrs. Berry to clear away the refection, and finds the two knights helmed, and sees, though 'tis dusk, that they wear doubtful brows, and guesses bad things for dear god Hymen in a twinkling.

'Dear! dear!' she exclaimed, 'and neither of you eaten a scrap! And there 's my dear young lady off into the prettiest sleep you ever see!'

'Ha?' cried the lover, illuminated.

'Soft as a baby!' Mrs. Berry averred. 'I went to look at her this very moment, and there 's not a bit of trouble in her breath. It come and it go like the sweetest regular instrument ever made. The black ox haven't trod on *her* foot yet! Most like it was the air of London. But only fancy, if you had called in a doctor! Why, I shouldn't have let her take any of his quackery. Now, there!'

Ripton attentively observed his chief, and saw him doff his hat with a curious caution, and peer into its recess, from which, during Mrs. Berry's speech, he drew forth a little glove—dropped there by some freak of chance.

'Keep me, keep me, now you have me!' sang the little glove, and amused the lover with a thousand conceits.

'When will she wake, do you think, Mrs. Berry?' he asked.

'Oh! we mustn't go for disturbing her,' said the guileful good creature. 'Bless ye! let her sleep it out. And if you young gentlemen was to take my advice, and go and take a walk for to get a appetite—everybody should eat, it 's their sacred duty, no matter what their feelings be, and I say it who 'm no chicken! I 'll frickashee this—which is a chicken—against your return. I 'm a cook, I can assure ye!'

The lover seized her two hands. 'You 're the best old soul in the world!' he cried. Mrs. Berry appeared willing to kiss him. 'We won't disturb her. Let her sleep. Keep her in bed, Mrs. Berry. Will you? And we 'll call to inquire after her this evening, and come and see her to-morrow. I 'm sure you 'll be kind to her. There! there!' Mrs. Berry was preparing to whimper. 'I trust her to you, you see. Good-bye, you dear old soul.'

He smuggled a handful of gold into her keeping, and went to dine with his uncles, happy and hungry.

Before they reached the hotel, they had agreed to draw Mrs. Berry into their confidence, telling her (with embellishments) all save their names, so that they might enjoy the counsel and assistance of that trump of a woman, and yet have nothing to fear from her. Lucy was to receive the name of Letitia, Ripton's youngest and best-looking

sister. The heartless fellow proposed it in cruel mockery of an old weakness of hers.

'Letitia!' mused Richard. 'I like the name. Both begin with L. There 's something soft—womanlike—in the L's.'

Material Ripton remarked that they looked like pounds on paper. The lover roamed through his golden groves. 'Lucy Feverel! that sounds better! I wonder where Ralph is. I should like to help him. He 's in love with my cousin Clare. He 'll never do anything till he marries. No man can. I 'm going to do a hundred things when it 's over. We shall travel first. I want to see the Alps. One doesn't know what the earth is till one has seen the Alps. What a delight it will be to her! I fancy I see her eyes gazing up at them.

'And oh, your dear blue eyes, that heavenward glance
With kindred beauty, banished humbleness,
Past weeping for mortality's distress—
Yet from your soul a tear hangs there in trance,
And fills, but does not fall;
Softly I hear it call
At heaven's gate, till sister Seraphs press
To look on you their old love from the skies:
Those are the eyes of Seraphs bright on your blue eyes!

Beautiful! These lines, Rip, were written by a man who was once a friend of my father's. I intend to find him and make them friends again. You don't care for poetry. It 's no use your trying to swallow it, Rip!'

'It sounds very nice,' said Ripton, modestly shutting his mouth.

'The Alps! Italy! Rome! and then I shall go to the East,' the hero continued. 'She 's ready to go anywhere with me, the dear brave heart! Oh, the glorious golden East! I dream of the desert. I dream I 'm chief of an Arab tribe, and we fly all white in the moonlight on our mares, and hurry to the rescue of my darling! And we push the spears, and we scatter them, and I come to the tent where she crouches, and catch her to my saddle, and away! Rip, what a life!'

Ripton strove to imagine he could enjoy it.

'And then we shall come home, and I shall lead Austin's

life, with her to help me. First be virtuous, Rip! and then serve your country heart and soul. A wise man told me that. I think I shall do something.'

Sunshine and cloud, cloud and sunshine, passed over the lover. Now life was a narrow ring; now the distances extended, were winged, flew illimitably. An hour ago and food was hateful. Now he manfully refreshed his nature, and joined in Algernon's encomiums on Miss Letitia Thompson.

Meantime Beauty slept, watched by the veteran volunteer of the hero's band. Lucy awoke from dreams which seemed reality, to the reality which was a dream. She awoke calling for some friend, 'Margaret!' and heard one say, 'My name is Bessy Berry, my love! not Margaret.' Then she asked piteously where she was, and where was Margaret, her dear friend, and Mrs. Berry whispered, 'Sure you 've got a dearer!'

'Ah!' sighed Lucy, sinking on her pillow, overwhelmed by the strangeness of her state.

Mrs. Berry closed the frill of her nightgown and adjusted the bedclothes quietly.

Her name was breathed.

'Yes, my love?' she said.

'Is he here?'

'He 's gone, my dear.'

'Gone? Oh, where?' The young girl started up in disorder.

'Gone, to be back, my love! Ah! that young gentleman!' Mrs. Berry chanted: 'Not a morsel have he eat; not a drop have he drunk!'

'Oh, Mrs. Berry! why did you not make him?' Lucy wept for the famine-struck hero, who was just then feeding mightily.

Mrs. Berry explained that to make one eat who thought the darling of his heart like to die, was a sheer impossibility for the cleverest of women; and on this deep truth Lucy reflected, with her eyes wide at the candle. She wanted one to pour her feelings out to. She slid her hand from under the bedclothes, and took Mrs. Berry's, and kissed it. The good creature required no further

avowal of her secret, but forthwith leaned her consummate bosom to the pillow, and petitioned Heaven to bless them both! Then the little bride was alarmed, and wondered how Mrs. Berry could have guessed it.

'Why,' said Mrs. Berry, 'your love is out of your eyes, and out of everything ye do.' And the little bride wondered more. She thought she had been so very cautious not to betray it. The common woman in them made cheer together after their own April fashion. Following which Mrs. Berry probed for the sweet particulars of this beautiful love-match; but the little bride's lips were locked. She only said her lover was above her in station.

'And you 're a Catholic, my dear!'

'Yes, Mrs. Berry!'

'And him a Protestant.'

'Yes, Mrs. Berry!'

'Dear, dear!—And why shouldn't ye be?' she ejaculated, seeing sadness return to the bridal babe. 'So as you was born, so shall ye be! But you 'll have to make your arrangements about the children. The girls to worship with you, the boys with him. It 's the same God, my dear! You mustn't blush at it, though you do look so pretty. If my young gentleman could see you now!'

'Please, Mrs. Berry!' Lucy murmured.

'Why, he will, you know, my dear!'

'Oh, please, Mrs. Berry!'

'And you that can't bear the thoughts of it! Well, I do wish there was fathers and mothers on both sides and dockments signed, and bridesmaids, and a breakfast; but love is love, and ever will be, in spite of them.'

She made other and deeper dives into the little heart, but though she drew up pearls, they were not of the kind she searched for. The one fact that hung as a fruit upon her tree of love, Lucy had given her; she would not, in fealty to her lover, reveal its growth and history, however sadly she yearned to pour out all to this dear old Mother Confessor.

Her conduct drove Mrs. Berry from the rosy to the autumnal view of matrimony, generally heralded by the announcement that it is a lottery.

'And when you see your ticket,' said Mrs. Berry, 'you shan't know whether it 's a prize or a blank. And, Lord knows! some go on thinking it 's a prize when it turns on 'em and tears 'em. I 'm one of the blanks, my dear! I drew a blank in Berry. He was a black Berry to me, my dear! Smile away, he truly was, and I a-prizin' him as proud as you can conceive! My dear!' Mrs. Berry pressed her hands flat on her apron. 'We hadn't been a three months man and wife, when that man—it wasn't the honeymoon, which some can't say — that man — yes, he kicked me. His wedded wife he kicked! Ah!' she sighed to Lucy's large eyes, 'I could have borne that. A blow don't touch the heart,' the poor creature tapped her sensitive side. 'I went on loving of him, for I 'm a soft one. Tall as a grenadier he is, and when out of service grows his moustache. I used to call him my body-guards-man—like a queen! I flattered him like the fools we women are. For, take my word for it, my dear, there 's nothing here below so vain as a man! That I know. But I didn't deserve it. . . . I 'm a superior cook. . . . I did not deserve that noways.' Mrs. Berry thumped her knee, and accentuated up her climax: 'I mended his linen. I saw to his adornments—he called his clothes, the bad man! I was a servant to him, my dear, and there—it was nine months—nine months from the day he swear to protect and cherish and that—nine calendar months, and my gentleman is off with another woman! Bone of his bone! —pish!' exclaimed Mrs. Berry, reckoning her wrongs over vividly. 'Here 's my ring. A pretty ornament! What do it mean? I 'm for tearin' it off my finger a dozen times in the day. It 's a symbol? I call it a tomfoolery for the dead-alive to wear it, that 's a widow and not a widow, and haven't got a name for what she is in any dixonary. I 've looked, my dear, and'—she spread out her arms—'Johnson haven't got a name for me!'

At this impressive woe Mrs. Berry's voice quavered into sobs. Lucy spoke gentle words to the poor outcast from Johnson. The sorrows of autumn have no warning for April. The little bride, for all her tender pity, felt happier when she had heard her landlady's moving tale of the

wickedness of man, which cast in bright relief the glory of that one hero who was hers. Then from a short flight of inconceivable bliss, she fell, shot by one of her hundred Argus-eyed fears.

'Oh, Mrs. Berry! I 'm so young! Think of me—only just seventeen!'

Mrs. Berry immediately dried her eyes to radiance. 'Young, my dear! Nonsense! There 's no so much harm in being young, here and there. I knew an Irish lady was married at fourteen. Her daughter married close over fourteen. She was a grandmother by thirty! When any strange man began, she used to ask him what pattern caps grandmothers wore. They 'd stare! Bless you! the grandmother could have married over and over again. It was her daughter's fault, not hers, you know.'

'She was three years younger,' mused Lucy.

'She married beneath her, my dear. Ran off with her father's bailiff's son. "Ah, Berry!" she 'd say, "if I hadn't been foolish, I should be my lady now—not granny!" Her father never forgave her—left all his estates out of the family.'

'Did her husband always love her?' Lucy preferred to know.

'In his way, my dear, he did,' said Mrs. Berry, coming upon her matrimonial wisdom. 'He couldn't help himself. If he left off, he began again. She was so clever, and did make him so comfortable. Cook! there wasn't such another cook out of a alderman's kitchen, no, indeed! And she a born lady! That tells ye it 's the duty of all women! She had her saying—"When the parlour fire gets low, put coals on the kitchen fire!" and a good saying it is to treasure. Such is man! no use in havin' their hearts if ye don't have their stomachs.'

Perceiving that she grew abstruse, Mrs. Berry added briskly: 'You know nothing about that yet, my dear. Only mind me and mark me: don't neglect your cookery. Kissing don't last: cookery do!'

Here, with an aphorism worthy a place in *The Pilgrim's Scrip*, she broke off to go posseting for her dear invalid. Lucy was quite well; very eager to be allowed to rise and

be ready when the knock should come. Mrs. Berry, in her loving considerateness for the little bride, positively commanded her to lie down and be quiet, and submit to be nursed and cherished. For Mrs. Berry well knew that ten minutes alone with the hero could only be had while the little bride was in that unattainable position.

Thanks to her strategy, as she thought, her object was gained. The night did not pass before she learnt, from the hero's own mouth, that Mr. Richards, the father of the hero, and a stern lawyer, was adverse to his union with this young lady he loved, because of a ward of his, heiress to an immense property, whom he desired his son to espouse; and because his darling Letitia was a Catholic —Letitia, the sole daughter of a brave naval officer deceased, and in the hands of a savage uncle, who wanted to sacrifice this beauty to a brute of a son. Mrs. Berry listened credulously to the emphatic narrative, and spoke to the effect that the wickedness of old people formed the excuse for the wildness of young ones. The ceremonious administration of oaths of secrecy and devotion over, she was enrolled in the hero's band, which now numbered three, and entered upon the duties with feminine energy, for there are no conspirators like women. Ripton's lieutenancy became a sinecure, his rank merely titular. He had never been married—he knew nothing about licences, except that they must be obtained, and were not difficult—he had not an idea that so many days' warning must be given to the clergyman of the parish where one of the parties was resident. How should he? All his forethought was comprised in the ring, and whenever the discussion of arrangements for the great event grew particularly hot and important, he would say, with a shrewd nod: 'We mustn't forget the ring, you know, Mrs. Berry!' and the new member was only prevented by natural complacence from shouting: 'Oh, drat ye and your ring, too!' Mrs. Berry had acted conspicuously in fifteen marriages, by banns, and by licence, and to have such an obvious requisite dinned in her ears was exasperating. They could not have contracted alliance with an auxiliary more invaluable, an authority so profound; and they

acknowledged it to themselves. The hero marched like an automaton at her bidding; Lieutenant Thompson was rejoiced to perform services as errand-boy in the enterprise.

'It 's in hopes you 'll be happier than me, I do it,' said the devout and charitable Berry. 'Marriages is made in heaven, they say; and if that's the case, I say they don't take much account of us below!'

Her own woeful experiences had been given to the hero in exchange for his story of cruel parents.

Richard vowed to her that he would henceforth hold it a duty to hunt out the wanderer from wedded bonds, and bring him back bound and suppliant.

'Oh, he 'll come!' said Mrs. Berry, pursing prophetic wrinkles: 'he 'll come of his own accord. Never anywheres will he meet such a cook as Bessy Berry! And he know her value in his heart of hearts. And I do believe, when he do come, I shall be opening these arms to him again, and not slapping his impidence in the face—I 'm that soft! I always was—in matrimony, Mr. Richards!'

As when nations are secretly preparing for war, the docks and arsenals hammer night and day, and busy contractors measure time by inches, and the air hums around for leagues as it were myriads of bees, so the house and neighbourhood of the matrimonial soft one resounded in the heroic style, and knew little of the changes of light decreed by Creation. Mrs. Berry was the general of the hour. Down to Doctors' Commons she expedited the hero, instructing him how boldly to face the Law, and fib: for that the Law never could resist a fib and a bold face. Down the hero went, and proclaimed his presence. And lo! the Law danced to him its sedatest lovely bear-dance. Think ye the Law less susceptible to him than flesh and blood? With a beautiful confidence it put the few familiar questions to him, and nodded to his replies: then stamped the bond, and took the fee. It must be an old vagabond at heart that can permit the irrevocable to go so cheap, even to a hero. For only mark him when he is petitioned by heroes and heroines to undo what he does so easily! That small archway of Doctors' Commons seems the eye of a needle, through which the lean purse has a way,

somehow, of slipping more readily than the portly; but once through, all are camels alike, the lean purse an especially big camel. Dispensing tremendous marriage as it does, the Law can have no conscience.

'I hadn't the slightest difficulty,' said the exulting hero.

'Of course not!' returns Mrs. Berry. 'It 's as easy, if ye 're in earnest, as buying a plum bun.'

Likewise the ambassador of the hero went to claim the promise of the Church to be in attendance on a certain spot, on a certain day, and there hear oath of eternal fealty, and gird him about with all its forces: which the Church, receiving a wink from the Law, obsequiously engaged to do, for less than the price of a plum-cake.

Meantime, while craftsmen and skilled women, directed by Mrs. Berry, were toiling to deck the day at hand, Raynham and Belthorpe slept—the former soundly; and one day was as another to them. Regularly every morning a letter arrived from Richard to his father, containing observations on the phenomena of London; remarks (mainly cynical) on the speeches and acts of Parliament; and reasons for not having yet been able to call on the Grandisons. They were certainly rather monotonous and spiritless. The baronet did not complain. That cold, dutiful tone assured him there was no internal trouble or distraction. 'The letters of a healthful physique!' he said to Lady Blandish, with sure insight. Complacently he sat and smiled, little witting that his son's ordeal was imminent, and that his son's ordeal was to be his own. Hippias wrote that his nephew was killing him by making appointments which he never kept, and altogether neglecting him in the most shameless way, so that his ganglionic centre was in a ten times worse state than when he left Raynham. He wrote very bitterly, but it was hard to feel compassion for his offended stomach.

On the other hand, young Tom Blaize was not forthcoming, and had dispatched no tidings whatever. Farmer Blaize smoked his pipe evening after evening, vastly disturbed. London was a large place—young Tom might be lost in it, he thought; and young Tom had his weaknesses. A wolf at Belthorpe, he was likely to be a sheep in London,

as yokels have proved. But what had become of Lucy? This consideration almost sent Farmer Blaize off to London direct, and he would have gone had not his pipe enlightened him. A young fellow might play truant and get into a scrape, but a young man and a young woman were sure to be heard of, *unless* they were acting in complicity. Why, of course, young Tom had behaved like a man, the rascal! and married her outright there, while he had the chance. It was a long guess. Still it was the only reasonable way of accounting for his extraordinary silence, and therefore the farmer held to it that he had done the deed. He argued as modern men do who think the hero, the upsetter of ordinary calculations, is gone from us. So, after dispatching a letter to a friend in town to be on the look out for son Tom, he continued awhile to smoke his pipe, rather elated than not, and mused on the shrewd manner he should adopt when Master Honeymoon did appear.

Toward the middle of the second week of Richard's absence, Tom Bakewell came to Raynham for Cassandra, and privately handed a letter to the Eighteenth Century, containing a request for money, and a round sum. The Eighteenth Century was as good as her word, and gave Tom a letter in return, enclosing a cheque on her bankers, amply providing to keep the heroic engine in motion at a moderate pace. Tom went back, and Raynham and Lobourne slept and dreamed not of the morrow. The System, wedded to Time, slept, and knew not how he had been outraged—anticipated by seven pregnant seasons. For Time had heard the hero swear to that legalizing instrument, and had also registered an oath. Ah, me! venerable Hebrew Time! he is unforgiving. Half the confusion and fever of the world comes of this vendetta he declares against the hapless innocents who have once done him a wrong. They cannot escape him. They will never outlive it. The father of jokes, he is himself no joke; which it seems the business of men to discover.

The days roll round. He is their servant now. Mrs. Berry has a new satin gown, a beautiful bonnet, a gold brooch, and sweet gloves, presented to her by the hero

wherein to stand by his bride at the altar to-morrow; and, instead of being an old wary hen, she is as much a chicken as any of the party, such has been the magic of these articles. Fathers she sees accepting the facts produced for them by their children; a world content to be carved out as it pleases the hero.

At last Time brings the bridal eve, and is blest as a benefactor. The final arrangements are made; the bridegroom does depart; and Mrs. Berry lights the little bride to her bed. Lucy stops on the landing where there is an old clock eccentrically correct that night. 'Tis the palpitating pause before the gates of her transfiguration. Mrs. Berry sees her put her rosy finger on the ONE about to strike, and touch all the hours successively till she comes to the TWELVE that shall sound 'wife' in her ears on the morrow, moving her lips the while, and looking round archly solemn when she has done; and that sight so catches at Mrs. Berry's heart that, not guessing Time to be the poor child's enemy, she endangers her candle by folding Lucy warmly in her arms, whimpering, 'Bless you for a darling! you innocent lamb! You shall be happy! You shall!'

Old Time gazes grimly ahead.

CHAPTER XXIX

IN WHICH THE LAST ACT OF A COMEDY TAKES THE PLACE OF THE FIRST

ALTHOUGH it blew hard when Caesar crossed the Rubicon, the passage of that river is commonly calm; calm as Acheron. So long as he gets his fare, the ferryman does not need to be told whom he carries: he pulls with a will, and heroes may be over in half an hour. Only when they stand on the opposite bank, do they see what a leap they have taken. The shores they have relinquished shrink to an infinite remoteness. There they have dreamed: here they must act. There lie youth and irresolution: here manhood and purpose. They are veritably in another land: a moral Acheron divides their life. Their memories scarce seem their own! The *Philosophical Geography* (about to be published) observes that each man has, one time or other, a little Rubicon—a clear or a foul water to cross. It is asked him: 'Wilt thou wed this Fate, and give up all behind thee?' And 'I will,' firmly pronounced, speeds him over. The above-named manuscript authority informs us, that by far the greater number of carcasses rolled by this heroic flood to its sister stream below, are those of fellows who have repented their pledge, and have tried to swim back to the bank they have blotted out. For though every man of us may be a hero for one fatal minute, very few remain so after a day's march even: and who wonders that Madam Fate is indignant, and wears the features of the terrible Universal Fate to him? Fail before her, either in heart or in act, and lo, how the alluring loves in her visage wither and sicken to what it is modelled on! Be your Rubicon big or small, clear or foul, it is the same: you shall not return. On—or to Acheron!—I subscribe to that saying of *The Pilgrim's Scrip*:

'The danger of a little knowledge of things is disputable:
but beware the little knowledge of one's self!'

Richard Feverel was now crossing the river of his ordeal. Already the mists were stealing over the land he had left: his life was cut in two, and he breathed but the air that met his nostrils. His father, his father's love, his boyhood and ambition, were shadowy. His poetic dreams had taken a living attainable shape. He had a distincter impression of the autumnal Berry and her household than of anything at Raynham. And yet the young man loved his father, loved his home: and I dare say Caesar loved Rome: but whether he did or no, Caesar when he killed the Republic was quite bald, and the hero we are dealing with is scarce beginning to feel his despotic moustache. Did he know what he was made of? Doubtless, nothing at all. But honest passion has an instinct that can be safer than conscious wisdom. He was an arrow drawn to the head, flying from the bow. His audacious mendacities and subterfuges did not strike him as in any way criminal; for he was perfectly sure that the winning and securing of Lucy would in the end be boisterously approved of, and in that case, were not the means justified? Not that he took trouble to argue thus, as older heroes and self-convicting villains are in the habit of doing, to deduce a clear conscience. Conscience and Lucy went together.

It was a soft, fair day. The Rubicon sparkled in the morning sun. One of those days when London embraces the prospect of summer, and troops forth all its babies. The pavement, the squares, the parks, were early alive with the cries of young Britain. Violet and primrose girls, and organ boys with military monkeys, and systematic bands very determined in tone if not in tune, filled the atmosphere, and crowned the blazing procession of omnibuses, freighted with business men, cityward, where a column of reddish-brown smoke—blown aloft by the south-west, marked the scene of conflict to which these persistent warriors repaired. Richard had seen much of early London that morning. His plans were laid. He had taken care to ensure his personal liberty against accidents, by leaving his hotel and his injured Uncle Hippias at sunrise. To-day or to-morrow his father was

to arrive. Farmer Blaize, Tom Bakewell reported to him, was raging in town. Another day and she might be torn from him: but to-day this miracle of creation would be his, and then from those glittering banks yonder, let them summon him to surrender her who dared! The position of things looked so propitious that he naturally thought the powers waiting on love conspired in his behalf. And she, too—since she must cross this river, she had sworn to him to be brave, and do him honour, and wear the true gladness of her heart in her face. Without a suspicion of folly in his acts, or fear of results, Richard strolled into Kensington Gardens, breakfasting on the foreshadow of his great joy, now with a vision of his bride, now of the new life opening to him. Mountain masses of clouds, rounded in sunlight, swung up the blue. The flowering chestnut pavilions overhead rustled and hummed. A sound in his ears as of a banner unfolding in the joyful distance lulled him.

He was to meet his bride at the church at a quarter past eleven. His watch said a quarter to ten. He strolled on beneath the long-stemmed trees toward the well dedicated to a saint obscure. Some people were drinking at the well. A florid lady stood by a younger one, who had a little silver mug half-way to her mouth, and evinced undisguised dislike to the liquor of the salutary saint.

'Drink, child!' said the maturer lady. 'That is only your second mug. I insist upon your drinking three full ones every morning we 're in town. Your constitution positively requires iron!'

'But, mamma,' the other expostulated, 'it 's so nasty. I shall be sick.'

'Drink!' was the harsh injunction. 'Nothing to the German waters, my dear. Here, let me taste.' She took the mug and gave it a flying kiss. 'I declare I think it almost nice—not at all objectionable. Pray, taste it,' she said to a gentleman standing below them to act as cup-bearer.

An unmistakable cis-Rubicon voice replied: 'Certainly, if it 's good fellowship; though I confess I don't think mutual sickness a very engaging ceremony.'

'Can one never escape from one's relatives?' Richard ejaculated inwardly.

Without a doubt those people were Mrs. Doria, Clare, and Adrian. He had them under his eyes.

Clare, peeping up from her constitutional dose to make sure no man was near to see the possible consequence of it, was the first to perceive him. Her hand dropped.

'Now, pray, drink, and do not fuss!' said Mrs. Doria.

'Mamma!' Clare gasped.

Richard came forward and capitulated honourably, since retreat was out of the question. Mrs. Doria swam to meet him: 'My own boy! My dear Richard!' profuse of exclamations. Clare shyly greeted him. Adrian kept in the background.

'Why, we were coming for you to-day, Richard,' said Mrs. Doria, smiling effusion; and rattled on: 'We want another cavalier. This is delightful! My dear nephew! You have grown from a boy to a man. And there 's down on his lip! And what brings you here at such an hour in the morning? Poetry, I suppose! Here, take my arm, child. Clare! finish that mug and thank your cousin for sparing you the third. I always bring her, when we are by a chalybeate, to take the waters before breakfast. We have to get up at unearthly hours. Think, my dear boy! Mothers are sacrifices! And so you 've been alone a fortnight with your agreeable uncle! A charming time of it you must have had! Poor Hippias! what may be his last nostrum?'

'Nephew!' Adrian stretched his head round to the couple. 'Doses of nephew taken morning and night fourteen days! And he guarantees that it shall destroy an iron constitution in a month.'

Richard mechanically shook Adrian's hand as he spoke.

'Quite well, Ricky?'

'Yes, well enough,' Richard answered.

'Well?' resumed his vigorous aunt, walking on with him, while Clare and Adrian followed. 'I really never saw you looking so handsome. There 's something about your face — look at me — you needn't blush. You 've grown to an Apollo. That blue buttoned-up frock coat